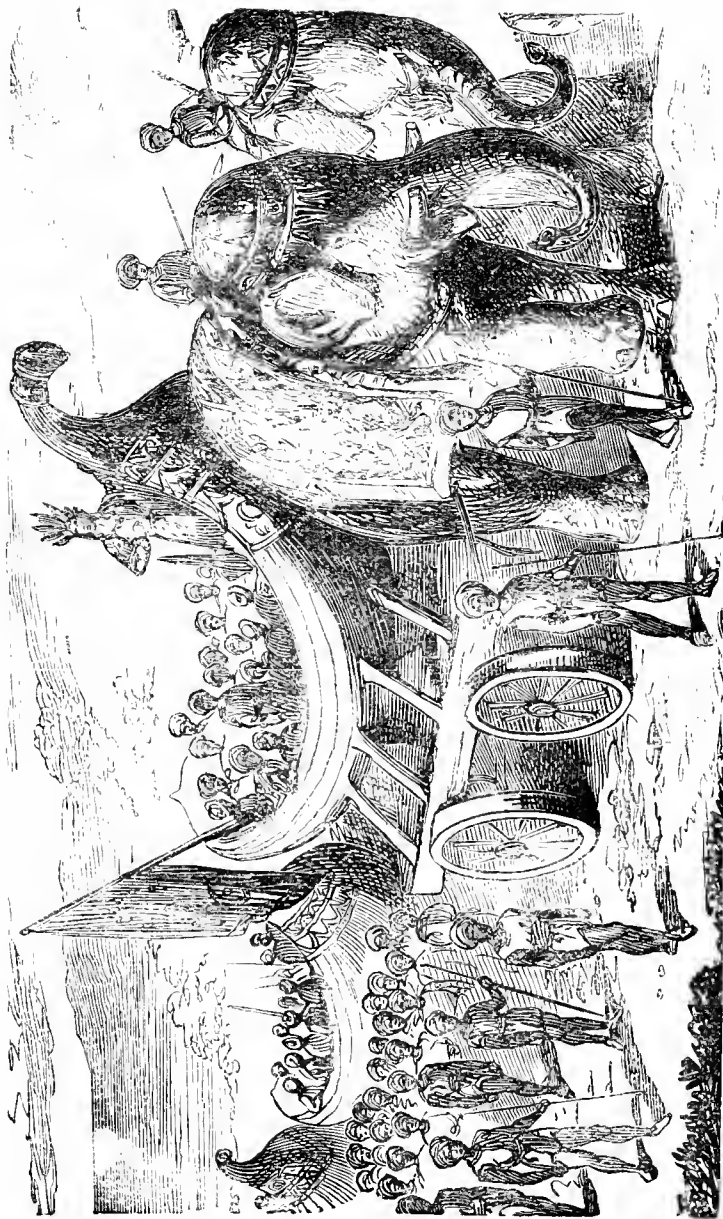


THE CLOUD KING

BY W. STEPHENS HAYWARD



AUTHOR OF "THE BLACK ANGEL."

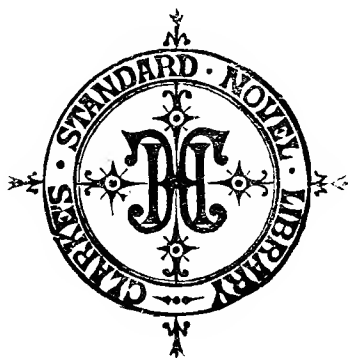


THE PROCESSION.

THE
CLOUD KING.

BY
W. STEPHENS HAYWARD,

AUTHOR OF "THE BLACK ANGEL," "STAR OF THE SOUTH," "THE FIERY
CROSS," "THE REBEL PRIVATEER," ETC., ETC.



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THE CLOUD KING;

OR,

Up in the Air, and down in the Sea

CHAPTER I.

FIRST ESSAYS AT BALLOONING—HOW I SENT TWO KITTENS UP
TO THE SKY.

FROM the time when, as a child of four or five years old, I used to blow soap-bubbles, and watched them soar away in the summer sun, glistening with all the hues of the rainbow, the dreams of my nights and aspirations of my days have been to emulate those daring spirits who, equalling, and even surpassing, the mighty eagle in his flight, have bent the very elements to their purpose, and have ascended into the bright blue sky miles above the clouds!

All the pocket money I could get was spent in the materials for toy-balloons; and never shall I forget the wild delight with which I watched my first successful attempt shoot up in the air, and soar away out of sight. The triumphant joy of Wellington as he saw the flower of the French infantry halt, stagger, and go down before the fierce onslaught of the Guards, in the last and decisive charge at Waterloo, was nothing to my proud exultation. I pictured in a moment to my fancy the realisation of all my hopes, seeing that I had made the first step, and might now call myself a real aeronaut.

I was then only ten years of age, and very small

of body. Nevertheless, there was hardly a book on balloons, balloon ascents, and subjects connected therewith, which I had not by some means or another procured and devoured. After this first success, my next essay was on a more ambitious scale. I aimed at nothing less than constructing a balloon which should be large enough to take up some live animals—a cat or dog, for instance.

The difficulties in my way were great; my father and mother rented a small farm of about sixty acres, and as they had nothing else to depend on beside their labour, the pocket-money I received was necessarily and properly small. Then the materials were expensive; and it took me months of saving before I could even provide the varnish for my projected balloon. Of course I could not afford silk; so I was obliged to content myself with thin calico, and the cheapest materials for varnish. Nevertheless, by sheer perseverance, I succeeded in my second attempt in ballooning.

I will not here describe how I made, varnished, and filled my balloon, as I wish to get on with my narrative. However, at the conclusion I will give full and minute particulars, by scrupulously following which any one can construct and inflate a small balloon.

The balloon was completed, and the operation of filling it with the gas commenced. It took me several hours, trotting backwards and forwards from the gas-works in the town with my gas-bags, before I had inflated my balloon. During my absence I had left it in charge of my younger brother, a child of six years, who also held in his lap the two kittens, who little knew the voyage of discovery on which they were to be sent.

Yes; I had actually taken two pet kittens from our old cat, and was about to send them up in the sky. Poor little things! we were all very fond of them; but I was so confident in the safety of my bal-

loon, that I thought it impossible any harm could happen to them. At last all was ready, and my balloon was filled, and only held to the ground by the string I had purposely fastened to it. It swayed and swung about in the breeze, as if impatient to be off. How I wished that it were big enough to bear me aloft; and how gladly would I have ventured had such been the case!

But this was not to be; so I placed the two little cats in the wicker car, and released the string.

"Hurrah!" I fairly screamed for joy; and my younger brother clapped his hands and rolled on the grass in very ecstasy, as my balloon shot aloft, the poor kittens mewling piteously all the while.

Away it went, higher than the tree-tops, and was borne by the wind in the direction of our house, which was distant about a quarter of a mile. Away we scampered after it, shouting and halloaing like mad boys. Each minute it rose higher; and by the time it was passing over our house, we could but just see the heads of the kittens peering over in blank astonishment, and wondering where the farmyard, the house, and the whole world were going.

Higher and higher it went, till nothing could be seen but a speck in the sky; then that too disappeared, and cats, balloon, and all were gone.

I must own I looked rather blank at this, for it had never struck me what would become of the kittens.

My little sister cried bitterly at the loss of her pets, and called me a cruel brute of a boy for sending them up. She knew, she said, that they would fall and be killed. But as hour after hour passed, and they did not do so, I answered triumphantly that her fears were groundless.

"Fall, indeed! they will never fall, sissy."

"Yes; but, Viotor, they will never come down;" and again the tears flowed.

To this I was unable to reply; nor were my sister's fears unfounded; for from that day to this I have

never seen or heard any thing of the two kittens and my balloon.

It must not be supposed for a moment that I was content to rest at these two trifling successes; I resolved to build a yet larger balloon, and ascend in it myself. In the course of a year I had again, by great perseverance and hard work, constructed another and much larger one. But this time the great quantity of gas required to fill it presented a serious difficulty.

I have already stated that I procured this indispensable material from the gas-works of the neighbouring town. I had ingratiated myself with the son of the manager—a lad of some sixteen—and through his influence I was permitted occasionally to fill the gas-bags which I had constructed, and when all was ready, carry them to fill my balloon.

But this last affair of mine was much larger than the other—its diameter was between four and five feet, whereas the other was less than two; consequently I required a greater quantity of gas to distend it, and had far more trouble in procuring it.

Then, again, coal-gas—which, of course, is that made in gas-works—is the very worst for the purpose. In the first place, it is much heavier than pure hydrogen; and in the second, it is always considerably laden with moisture. This latter difficulty I overcame by passing the gas through a tube filled with quick-lime. This substance has so great an affinity for water, that when brought in contact with gas it satisfies its desire by robbing the latter of every particle.

The impurity of the gas I could not help—that was hopeless. When I had got all in readiness, I began early in the morning trotting backwards and forwards to the gas-works with my gas-bags. It was well on in the afternoon before I had sufficiently inflated my balloon for it to rise. When I had done so, and it was completely full, I found, to my intense disappointment, that its buoyancy was nothing like what I expected. I seated myself in the little wicker car; but my un-

grateful balloon showed not the least symptom of rising. Evidently I had miscalculated, and, so far as its bearing me aloft was concerned, the labour of many months was an utter failure.

Reluctantly forced to acknowledge this fact, I alighted from my seat greatly crestfallen. The balloon, however, though it would not carry me, kicked and plunged like a colt impatient to be off when relieved of my weight; so I attached the end of a ball of twine to the car, and suffered it to mount as far as it would allow. Notwithstanding my disappointment, I could not but acknowledge that it looked very grand and glorious in the summer sun, as it bounded and swayed about in the air higher than the trees.

I pulled it down to earth frequently, and allowed it to ascend again; till, tired of this recreation, I looked about for something fresh. At last a brilliant idea struck me—an idea the carrying out of which had well-nigh ended fatally, and did put an end to all my ballooning for many a long month.

CHAPTER II.

HOW I SENT MY BABY BROTHER ON A VOYAGE OF DISCOVERY AFTER THE KITTENS.

MY little sister, who had in time become reconciled to the loss of the two kittens, accompanied me to see me ascend in my balloon. Poor little Agnes! she had become infected with my enthusiasm, and really believed so much in my wonderful skill and knowledge, that she thought the whole affair was perfectly safe—a bit of mere harmless fun.

She had in her arms my youngest brother, a little baby of only twelve months.

“Aggie,” I said suddenly, “let’s give baby a ride in the balloon; he’s very little, and would go up beautifully.”

“Oh, no, no!” she cried, hugging her charge; “I

know he'd go up, Vic, but, like my two poor kittens, he would never come down again."

"Nonsense!" I said; "I will hold the string, and can pull him down when we wish."

Ultimately I prevailed on my sister to consent, and we placed baby in the car, carefully wrapping him in a shawl.

Then I released the balloon, and up he shot into the air, till checked by the string. For a moment the balloon remained stationary; then a gust of wind gave it so sudden an impulse as to break the string, and in an instant I realised the terrible truth that poor baby had gone on a voyage of discovery after the kittens.

My sister cried bitterly, and I myself could not restrain a burst of terror, tears, and remorse.

Quickly recovering myself, however, I started off in pursuit of the balloon, which was being gently floated by the breeze across the field at a height a little above the tree-tops. Aggie ran after me, crying and wringing her hands.

Fortunate it was, indeed, that the breeze was light, and, the gas being of bad quality, the balloon not very buoyant. It just hovered above the tree-tops, going at a pace, however, with which we could barely keep up. Passing near our house, my mother and father and some of the men heard the outcry, and hastened out to see what was the matter.

My mother swooned away when she learned the dreadful truth; while my father and some of the labourers gave chase to the balloon with its baby freight.

Away we went in full pursuit, over hedges and ditches at frantic speed, and still the balloon continued mockingly sailing calmly on just before us, and at about the same height.

At last, when we were all well-nigh out of breath, and were being distanced by the object of our pursuit, it fortunately floated against the top branches of a

tall poplar-tree. A small rent was torn in it, through which the gas slowly escaped ; and as soon as it again floated clear of the obstruction, it began to descend slowly and majestically, till it landed the car gently on the green turf.

When we reached it, its innocent little passenger was crowing and chuckling, appearing to think it the greatest fun in the world.

My father—I must own deservedly—gave me a tremendous thrashing ; and for the present, and many a weary month after, my ballooning was utterly put a stop to.

But the fire of ambition was not out. It smouldered fiercely within my breast, till an event occurred which gave me an opportunity of repeating my efforts on a larger and grander scale, and led to results and adventures most wonderful.

This, however, I will reserve for another chapter.

CHAPTER III.

WE EMIGRATE TO CALIFORNIA, AND GO TO THE DIGGINGS—I
SAVE UP THE GOLD I OBTAIN, AND IN TIME CONSTRUCT A
MONSTER BALLOON.

I HAD attained the age of thirteen years when the event of which I speak happened. For more than two years I had been denied all opportunity of working at my favourite project. Since the unfortunate affair related in the last chapter, I was obliged to content myself with reading books on balloons and aeronautics at every spare opportunity by day, and dreaming of my future greatness and achievements by night.

This, so far, was well, for in less than two years I thoroughly mastered the subject ; and I firmly believe that, excepting in experience, no person, not even the great Mr. Green, knew more than myself.

At this time the gold-fields of California were in

their full play, those of Australia just discovered. My father resolved to emigrate, taking us all with him. California was decided on, the farm and stock sold, and in two months from the day the subject was first mooted, we were at sea, bound round Cape Horn to San Francisco and the golden valleys of California. I will pass over our voyage, our going up to the mines, and come at once to my story.

We settled on the banks of the Sacramento river, and having built a hut, my father, my elder brother, and myself commenced to work at gold-digging.

We were lucky in very soon pitching on a place where the gold was sufficiently abundant to pay us all three exceedingly well.

We usually got about three ounces a day, which, at 3*l.* 10*s.* or 3*l.* 12*s.* the ounce, yielded as the result of our labour 60*l.* or 70*l.* a week. The work was both bad and disagreeable. Our "claim," as it was called, was a wet one, and we had to be constantly up to our knees in water, which all our pumping and baling could not keep down.

Nevertheless, notwithstanding the hardness of the work, my youth, and small size, every night when we marched off I took my "prospecting pan," and spent a couple of hours washing the "tailings," or dirt which had been previously washed, but in which there was always a certain quantity of fine gold.

Sometimes I got two ounces a week in this manner, sometimes only one; but the result was, that at the end of a twelvemonth I had obtained and stored up seventy ounces of pure gold, worth about 250*l.* This, for a boy of fourteen, was not bad. My father, in the same time, had got nearly a thousand ounces, and talked of returning to Old England after another year's search, when he would have sufficient, he hoped, to buy a large farm.

Now I thought it time to commence my operations, more especially as, by the finding of a large nugget, my store was increased to 350*l.*-worth of gold.

Doubtless my readers will guess the object I had in view, and which I had never for a moment lost sight of for four years.

I carefully calculated the expense of the materials (every thing was much dearer there than in England, of course), and came to the conclusion that I could purchase every thing—the silk, the varnish, and the materials for making gas, also the apparatus—for about 400*l*.

I contrived either to get or send to San Francisco every month for a small stock of materials. I then commenced to work one hour every night at my project ; still, however, carrying on my gold-seeking.

First I determined to build a bark hut in a secluded valley two miles from the diggings.

The only assistance I had was that of an Indian boy, whom I called Jacko. He had left his tribe, was quite friendless, and lived by drawing water, chopping wood, &c., for the diggers. I soon found what a useful aid the Indian lad was to me, especially in bush-work, and secured his services every night for a trifling sum.

When the hut was finished, Jacko lived in it, and frequently I myself, after working half the night, would sleep there also, feeling too tired to return to the camp.

In four months' time I had made up my store to over 400*l*., and had purchased the greater part of the silk and all the varnish ; and in two months more I set to work with a will, cutting it into strips and sewing it together. This I completed in less than a month with the aid of Jacko, who was wild with curiosity to know what I was going to do with this "much large bag," as he called it. I now put the balloon away, and proceeded to make my net. This was a very tedious operation, and occupied me nearly a month, sometimes working half the night. Then came preparing the varnish. This done, I dragged forth my balloon (of course, when folded up, it lay in a very

small space), and commenced to varnish it bit by bit, till I had given it two or three coats all over. The varnish soon dried, as I had been careful to select the best materials ; and now all was ready except the gas — all except the gas ; but how was that to be managed ? There were no gas-works for me to go to !

The operation of making the net to encircle the balloon was, perhaps, the most tedious of any. I used what sailors call “marline stuff,” making the meshes small at the top, and gradually increasing in size as they descended. This was obviously necessary, for, of course, when the balloon was in the air the principal strain on the netting would be at the top, the buoyant gas constantly endeavouring to force its way upwards. Were it not for the net, indeed, it would rend the thin silk to tatters and escape into the air.

I made a hoop of many pieces of the lightest wood I could procure. This was to go round the centre of the balloon, and to it I intended to attach both the netting and the ropes suspending my wicker car.

So soon as I had finished my netting, and completely prepared my balloon for the reception of the gas, I set about the task of making this latter. I procured at various times several carboys of sulphuric acid, also about six hundred pounds’ weight of iron-filings. Having sunk two large casks in the ground, I placed the iron-filings in them, not altogether in bulk, but in layers, separated by straw, in order to get a greater surface. To each of these casks I attached a tube, or hose, made of canvas, and the ends of these tubes I inserted into another and smaller cask, which latter was filled with quick-lime in coarse lumps. At the opposite end of this smaller cask I fitted a cock connected with another piece of canvas tubing, the extremity of which latter was inserted in the neck of the balloon. I next mixed my sulphuric acid with six times the quantity of water, poured the diluted acid into the two casks, and quickly closed the bung-hole.

Now, when diluted sulphuric acid is poured on

iron, great heat is produced, decomposition takes place, and hydrogen gas is evolved in large quantities.

The gas was forced to pass through my tubing into the smaller cask filled with lime. The object of this I will explain.

Gas produced by the action of dilute sulphuric acid on zinc or acid is always highly charged with water, and consequently loses a great portion of its buoyancy. Now lime, as I have said before, has a great affinity for water, and greedily absorbs—drinks it up whenever presented to it. Thus, by forcing my gas to pass through the barrel of lime, it was robbed of all its moisture, and passed into the balloon dry and buoyant, about fifteen times lighter than common air.

I commenced filling my balloon long before dawn on the day I had fixed for my ascent. I knew it would take me hours in filling; and employed myself in packing and arranging every thing I intended to take with me on my aerial trip. Now, I did not intend to remain in the air above a few hours at the most. I thought I would ascend to the height of two or three miles, so as to enjoy the magnificent view; and then, after floating about in the clouds till tired, would return to earth. Still, however, I thought it prudent to take every precaution. I knew I might be borne to an upper current, and drifted out to sea before I could descend. Perhaps, indeed, my voyage might extend to days instead of hours. I had heard of such accidents happening to aeronauts, and resolved to be prepared. At times, too, I knew not why, I felt a sort of foreboding that this adventure of mine would end in an extraordinary way—in a way widely different from what I expected. Still I had not a particle of fear, so confident was I in my own skill, the stability of my balloon, and the precautions I had taken.

I had provided two small kegs of water, a Dutch cheese, a ham, and a bag of biseuits—enough for a fortnight, if necessary—not that I expected such a long trip, but because I was determined to be fore-

armed. I had also two large blankets and an opossum cloak, to protect me against the cold, which I had heard was intense at great heights. But more than this, I had also actually purchased a small portable stove on my last visit to San Francisco, so made that no flame could escape from it and endanger igniting the gas.

I had provided two bags of sand for ballast, some wood-chips, and a few pounds of coal. This latter I did not expect to use, except by way of ballast ; for I had not the remotest intention of using my stove, or, indeed, having occasion for it, as I thought I would descend before the cold became too great. Then I had a thermometer, a small barometer, a mariner's compass, and a telescope ; also a small quadrant, which I had purchased from one of the sailors in the ship in which we came out. I did not forget my watch—a plain English silver one—and determined to take with me as companions two pigeons and a small Isle-of-Skye terrier. A flask of brandy completed my equipment, at least so far as I remember.

Well, at last all was ready. No sooner had I poured the diluted sulphuric acid into the barrels, than a violent effervescence and boiling commenced ; and the liberated gas poured through my tubes, through the lime barrel, and into my balloon. Gradually, as the gas streamed in, the monster swelled and bulged out, until, by 10 o'clock, it was nearly filled. Then I carefully arranged all my materials in the car, so as to balance it evenly ; and looked to the ropes and lines to see all clear. By half-past eleven the balloon was fully inflated, and surged and struggled desperately, as if wishing to escape from the cords that held it down. I now, with palpitating heart, but no fear, took my seat in the car ; and then, one by one, cast off all the ropes but a single cord, which passed through the bottom of the car, and was secured by a knot. The balloon rose to the length of this, and there remained stationary, gently surging about in the breeze.

Jacko was capering and dancing about in mad delight at seeing my "much big bag" floating in the air, with myself seated beneath. I waved an adieu to him, and, with feelings of unbounded pride and exultation, took hold of the knot and commenced loosening it. At that moment a shout attracted my attention, and casting my eyes in the direction whence it came, I saw my father, followed by one of his labourers, running towards me. Noticing my absence from the "claim" that morning,—a thing which had never happened before,—he had come in search of me, and, to his intense surprise, had found me calmly floating in the air in a balloon, only held to the earth by one thin cord. I heard him call to me to come down, at the same time running towards the rope which held me. For one instant I hesitated, and then with sudden resolution loosened the knot and let the rope slip through.

To my utter surprise, I felt no motion ! Was my balloon, then, the work of so many months, a failure ? I gazed around me in dismay, then down on the earth, and learned the truth.

The earth appeared to be miraculously vanishing from my sight.

I was shooting up in the air with inconceivable velocity, though the motion was quite imperceptible !

CHAPTER IV

UP IN THE AIR.

MY feelings at that moment I can never describe. The morning was bright and sunny ; white, fleecy fine-weather clouds being the only ones in the sky. The panorama-like view below me was glorious in the extreme. There, stretched beneath me, were the golden valleys of California, with the thousands of diggers at work, looking, from the elevation at which

I was, like so many ants. Then, far away to the west, I could perceive a faint blue line, which I knew to be the Pacific Ocean, and could distinguish without much difficulty the city of San Francisco, though it was at a great distance from the spot where I ascended. When next I looked down, I could but just make out the forms of my father, the labourer, and Jacko, standing motionless, and doubtless speechless, with astonishment. I now threw out some small pieces of paper—they appeared to drop like stones. This, however, was not so, but the effect was produced by my own ascent, which was at a terrible rate. Still, however, I felt not the least particle of alarm ; on the contrary, my spirits rose with the balloon, as it shot up to the sky. Higher, higher, still higher. Now we disappear from view in a thick mist or vapour forming the white clouds which look so light and fleecy from earth. We do not remain long in these, but quickly shoot up into the clear atmosphere beyond. Then I enjoyed indeed a splendid sight ! Above me nothing but the glorious sun and the deep azure blue of the heavens ; the sun, from the clearness of the air at that elevation, brighter, and the air bluer, than ever I had seen them before. The sky, indeed, was of a very different tint from that we are accustomed to. It was as deep as Prussian blue, and had a purple tint, which rendered the effect very glorious.

Beneath me, too, what a sight was spread forth ! No dingy earth, dull, foggy, gloomy ; but a brilliant sea or meadow of sparkling white, dancing and flashing in the sun's rays. The white clouds completely concealed the dull old earth, and lay beneath me, a vast field of pure white, tumbling and rolling in billows, the tops of which flashed and sparkled in the sunlight till I could almost fancy they were waves of driven snow spangled with diamonds.

I know not how long I remained in a half-trance, gazing in rapt wonder on the glories of the view ; but I was aroused by a feeling of cold, and slight difficulty

of breathing. I looked at the thermometer, and saw that it stood at 32° Fahrenheit—the freezing-point. I wrapped myself in my opossum cloak, and took but little heed of this, determined to ascend yet higher, and enjoy yet more fully my triumph. Upwards we went with amazing velocity (I could tell this by repeating my experiment with the bits of paper), while the temperature continually became colder. On attempting to take a drink of water from my keg, I found it was nearly all ice; and looking at the thermometer, found it stood at 12° below freezing. Still I was loth to descend; and as I took no steps to do so, of course the balloon continued to dart yet higher and higher into the air.

In the space of half an hour the cold was most intense, the pigeons appeared to be asleep or stupefied, while the little dog crouched under my opossum cloak, whining pitcously.

Now casting my eyes towards the western horizon, which the sun was already beginning to approach, I perceived that there was a break or termination in the white field of clouds above which I floated. At first I could not make out what this was; but using my glass, I discovered, to my great surprise, that it was not the earth, as I supposed, but the sea—the Pacific Ocean. Although surprised at this, I was not decomposed, for I knew that the sea was to the west, and that we had been floating westward. I also remembered the vast height at which I was, and no longer wondered at being able plainly to distinguish it. However, I now thought it time to begin my descent, and pulling the valve-string, the gas commenced to rush out with a roaring noise, like that of steam escaping from an engine.

Having let out sufficient, I again tried the experiment with the bits of paper. This time, instead of falling, they appeared to shoot up in the air, proving that I was rapidly descending.

I now observed a great commotion in the field of

white clouds which I was approaching. It seemed to be torn and rent asunder in all directions, and I soon perceived that this was caused by a violent wind from the north-west.

Already to the eastward the clouds had been dispersed, and the ocean was in view; but imagine my dismay when, as they cleared off to the westward, I perceived that there also was the sea.

While the earth was hid from me by the dense curtain of clouds, I had been carried out to sea without knowing it. It is true that I knew I was being drifted to the westward, but I had not the least idea the current of air was so strong as to carry me so great a distance in so short a time.

In a few minutes the clouds were all dispersed, and I had a clear view. Far away to the westward I could distinguish the land, while to the east, south, and north nothing could be seen but the broad expanse of ocean.

The sun was now approaching the horizon, and I began to be seriously alarmed at the prospect before me. However, as I continued to descend, I perceived that I had entered another current of air, and I was being drifted to the south-east. This consoled me in a measure; for although it would not take me back to the country whence I had started, I saw that I was approaching the land, and doubted not I could descend near some town or village, whence, as I had money and gold, I could easily make my way to San Francisco, and thence to the mines.

Carefully scanning the horizon with my telescope, I perceived an object to the southward and eastward, which at first I mistook for a small island in the ocean; but in a few minutes I saw it was a ship. Indeed, so rapidly was I being carried along by the wind as I descended, that when about three-quarters of a mile high, I was nearly right above the vessel.

I was now descending so fast that I thought in about a minute or so more I should have dashed into

the sea with my balloon. I threw out a bag of ballast, and was about throwing out more, in order to rise again, when the thought struck me that I would allow the balloon to descend close to the surface, and when sufficiently near the vessel, let out the gas, and allow it to fall in the water. I knew the car was sufficiently buoyant to float, besides which I could swim, and so had little fear.

In accordance with this plan I threw out a little more ballast, till the balloon descended very slowly indeed. This done, I took a deliberate survey of the ship as I came sailing up astern. She was now about a quarter of a mile to the southward, and less than that beneath me, so that I could make out every thing, even the name on her stern.

She was the American vessel, the *Sovereign of the Seas*, and had been advertised to sail on the preceding day. I remembered reading in the San-Francisco paper a list of the passengers going by her, also the cargo she was to carry. Among this was eighty thousand ounces of gold, worth nearly 300,000*l.* sterling. At the time the thought struck me what a prize she would prove to a pirate, should one overhaul her with her rich freight. She was sailing along under single-reefed topsails and foresail. By this I knew that it was blowing a stiff gale, although I myself, being borne with it, did not feel the slightest motion; for if not, she would have had more sails set, as the wind was favourable.

Her passengers and crew were all on deck, and were gazing up in astonishment at my balloon. Even the man at the helm and the look-out were staring up at the novel sight. Well would it have been for them, indeed, had they not been so gazing.

I was now, as I judged, only about some seven or eight hundred yards high, and continued slowly to descend. Casting my eyes around on the ocean beneath me, I now saw, at a distance of about five miles, a small island in the sea. Far away to the eastward

of this island I could distinguish the high land of California. I was wondering what island this could be, when, chancing to cast my eyes on the sea, in front of the ship, I saw a sight which filled me with consternation.

The vessel was steering a course which would clear the island by about three miles. But right in her track I saw a group of dark objects in the water, over which the sea was breaking furiously. They were rocks, either undiscovered, and so not laid down in any chart, or else they had been suddenly upheaved from the bed of the ocean by volcanic or other power. I have said that a strong gale was blowing, and when I add that there was also a heavy sea, which broke furiously over the rocks, throwing the spray high aloft, the reader may imagine the imminent danger of the ship.

Not a soul perceived the danger ahead—all were gazing in wonder at my balloon; and as for the man at the helm, the foresail obstructed his view of the sea ahead.

Onwards, still onwards, the doomed vessel sped through the waves, right towards the fatal breakers. Gloriously the white sails shone in the light of the setting sun, as she bounded madly on towards her fate.

The rocks were barely a quarter of a mile ahead, and she was dashing towards them at the rate of at least twelve knots an hour.

I shouted and waved my hands, hoping to warn them of their danger; but my voice was too weak to be heard, my signals were not understood.

And now the sun went down. Nearer and nearer the ship sped to her fate, rushing blindly on, none on board dreaming of danger. I was now right above her, and had descended considerably; so I ventured again to shout my loudest, in order, if possible, to warn them of their danger.

"Breakers!—breakers ahead!" again and again I shouted. I am heard!

All is confusion on board the *Sovereign of the Seas*; the sailors run to and fro—the yards are swung round—the helm put hard a-lee—and she swiftly shot round, and headed to the west. For one moment her fate hung in the balance—the dreadful rocks were scarce twenty yards on her lee-beam—she forges ahead slowly, and for a moment I believed her safe.

Crash!—the mainmast goes over the side—she has struck on one of the rocks below the surface, and, keeling over on her side, is borne by the heaving sea right on to the breakers.

Next the foremast goes—then the mizenmast. I plainly hear the crash of both. Then I see her raised aloft by a tremendous roller, and dashed violently on the dreadful rocks. The wind howls and moans fearfully, and the breakers roar. I can hear both plainly, for I am now very near the sea.

But high above the noise of the storm a terrible sound is borne aloft. One long, piercing shriek—the death-cry of scores of human beings.

Then all is still, save the howling winds and roaring waves.

Splintered timbers, and human forms struggling in the agonies of death, are all that remain of the crew and passengers of the good ship *Sovereign of the Seas*.

CHAPTER V

AM SWEEPED ALOFT YET HIGHER, AND AFTER MUCH PERIL AND SUFFERING ENTER THE GLOOMY REGIONS OF ETERNAL NIGHT.

UTTERLY stunned and aghast at the suddenness of the calamity, I remained gazing at the place where the ship had been smashed up and engulfed.

The furious waves tossed about a quantity of timber and wreck; but I could not discover a solitary human being. All had perished, either by drowning or by

being dashed to pieces against the rocks, over which the waves completely swept, thus precluding any hope.

I was swiftly borne away from the scene of this terrible disaster by the wind; and in a few minutes night, closing around, shut out even the distant rocks and breakers from my sight.

When I awoke from the state of stupefaction in which I was plunged, I found myself and balloon quite close to the surface of the sea. I looked around the vast expanse of ocean.

Where was I?—in a balloon, miles out in the Pacific. Could it be indeed true, or was it but a dreadful dream?

Suddenly I bethought me of my quadrant and the stars. I singled out the pole-star, and took an altitude, making allowance for my height above the sea, which I guessed at about fifty yards. I found the altitude about 30° . This, after making my calculations, gave the latitude at about 29° N.

Now, San Francisco is between the latitude 37° and 38° N. Therefore, if my calculations were correct, I must have been carried to the southward nearly nine degrees of latitude, or 540 miles, and to the westward how far I knew not. Then I bethought myself of the island I had seen: what island could it be?

I remembered now that there was a small island in the Pacific called Gaudaloupe. It is situate in latitude 29° N., long. 118° W., distant from the mainland about 130 miles. This distance would about correspond with that of the land I had seen to the westward; and, to my deep despair, the conviction forced itself on me that I was some six or seven hundred miles from San Francisco, and was now being borne to the south and west right out into the Pacific Ocean.

I must have entered a current of air above the clouds which travelled with enormous velocity, to have brought me so vast a distance since the morning.

And now whither was I being drifted? I could ask myself the question, but, alas! could not answer it. All I knew was, that I was rapidly drifting yet farther into the ocean. A pleasant predicament, certainly!

I was now so close to the sea as to render a further ascent necessary, otherwise my car would soon be in the water. Accordingly I threw out a bag of ballast, which caused the balloon again to shoot up aloft. When I had ascended to about the height of half a mile, I looked round for the string of the valve to let out some gas, and thus prevent us from rising too high.

To my dismay, I could not find it! It had become loose from the rail to which I had fastened it, and now swung far out of my reach. Now, to add to my troubles, I could not let gas out without tearing the balloon, and, consequently, could not descend, but must continue rising till the balloon burst, or something else happened.

Up, up, still upwards, it shot all through that dreadful night, till I thought I should soon reach the stars. The earth now appeared to me only a dull, dark, round plate, while each moment the cold grew more intense.

I endeavoured to take a drink of water from my barrel: it was frozen. I then took a sip of brandy, and wrapped myself up in my blanket for protection from the bitter cold. I noticed that the thermometer stood at 10° , or 22° below freezing.

The cold was so intense as almost to throw me into a state of stupor, and I began to think of lighting the fire in the stove. For a long time I dreaded to do so, for fear of the flame igniting the gas; but my sufferings from the cold were now so acute, that I resolved to risk it.

After much trouble I succeeded in making a small fire in the little stove. My hands had quite lost all feeling from contact with the intensely cold iron and coal, and my first care was to warm them into life.

When the blood began to circulate in them again, the pain was most intense, and brought tears into my eyes. Strange to say, after having lit my fire I was quite out of breath—even that slight exertion made me pant and gasp as though I had been running a race. This, however, I accounted for by the extreme rarity of the air; and I remembered then, in many of the accounts of ascents I had read, the aeronauts complained of the same thing.

I now began to feel very drowsy; and having arranged my fire to last for an hour or so, I huddled myself up close to the stove, with the little dog in my arms, and went to sleep. When I awoke it was light, and the rays of the sun almost dazzled me. Strange to say, however, although the sun was high in the heavens—I must have slept nearly twelve hours—the cold was still most intense, and my first thought was to relight the fire, which had, of course, gone out. This I accomplished in safety; and having warmed myself by placing my body against the stove, proceeded to look around on my prospects.

The first thing I noticed was, that the balloon was enormously distended—almost to bursting, in fact. Now I discovered the string of the valve swinging at a distance from the car quite beyond my reach. I raised myself, and looked over at the world beneath me. What a sight met my eyes! The balloon was at least five miles high; and beneath me I beheld, not the earth, but a *vast disc of water*. Sea, sea, nothing but sea—blue, and apparently smooth as polished glass; for at that height I could discern no waves. At first I was utterly bewildered, and thought that it could not be the earth I saw, but some other planet or star, and that I had been drawn within the influence of its attraction during the night. But on consideration, I decided that I was out above the Pacific Ocean, with no land in sight. I had no means of telling where I was, or in what direction I was drifting, as the balloon *appeared* to be perfectly motionless. This,

however, I knew to be a deception, for when in the gale of wind near the sea it was the same. I ate some biscuit and cheese, and quenched my thirst with some water, after melting the ice over the stove.

I now proceeded to experiment with bits of paper. When I threw them out they fluttered about, and did not appear to fall. This convinced me that the balloon had ceased to rise any higher. Probably a part of the gas had escaped by degrees, and the balloon had so lost some of its buoyancy.

Next I carefully scanned the horizon with my telescope, and discovered some dark spots at least fifty or sixty miles off. In ten or twelve minutes by my watch—which I now remembered to wind up—I could discover they were a group of islands; and in less than an hour I was right over them. I took their bearings by my compass on first perceiving them, and found they lay exactly 7° W. Now, I knew they must have been at least sixty miles off—probably more—when I first perceived them; so that I was certainly being whirled along at the rate of at least sixty miles an hour, and at a height of five or six miles from the earth, or rather sea.

What these islands were I did not at the time know; but I have since come to the conclusion that they were the Sandwich Islands, in the North Pacific. If such were the case, I must have been travelling all night at a far greater speed than sixty miles an hour.

The day passed on, gloomily, hopelessly, drearily. Night closed; and as my stock of coal began to diminish, the cold seemed to increase; and I found, on trial, that the balloon was again rising yet higher in the air. This I could account for; because the fuel I burned produced the same effect as throwing out ballast. Now this was a very alarming discovery; for I could not possibly descend without letting my fire out, and that appeared to me to be certain death, so intense was the cold at that elevation.

Another day broke—another sun rose; and my eye fell on the same vast expanse of ocean, unbroken by a single island.

My third day in the air came, and night again closed in, to be passed, as before, in a sort of stupor.

I was so exceedingly weak on the morning of the fourth day, that it was with the utmost difficulty I could kindle the chips to light my fire, which had again gone out. But towards the afternoon, having taken some biscuit and cheese, and a little brandy, I felt stronger and better. My breathing, also, was less oppressed; and although, by the thermometer, the cold was even greater, I did not feel it so much. I supposed I was becoming acclimatised.

Hitherto the air had been clear, and the vast sheet of ocean had been always visible. On the evening of the fourth day, however, dense mists and clouds gathered below me, and all was hidden. As far as I could see of the world, I might have been floating in space.

I passed the night as before, in a half-sleep, half-stupor; and the light of day broke on my fifth day in the balloon.

As soon as I awoke, I again summoned all my strength to light my fire in the stove. Weak as I was, in such rarefied air it was a terrible task, and several times I was near fainting; but at last I accomplished it. A draught of brandy somewhat revived me, and I again looked forth on the prospect.

Above me the sky was of a deep azure; below me was a vast sheet of clouds, like a field of fleecy wool. The sun was below these, but at places his golden rays would partly penetrate the white cloud. I looked to the east, to the north, to the south: the same monotonous prospect—beautiful, but to me dreadfully dismal and hope-killing. I began to despair, and almost determined to cut a big rent in the balloon, and fall headlong to earth or sea, as the case might be. When I turned my gaze to the south-west

however, I noticed a darkness in the sky like the loom of land, or a dim, undefined, dark cloud. This darkness appeared to rear itself far higher than I was; indeed, it appeared to go right up into the sky.

What could it be? Land?—mountains? Impossible! No mountains could tower over me at that vast distance; for I knew I must be six miles high, or even more. The day passed, and I continued to strain my eyes in endeavouring to discover what this mysterious gloom was. It was certain I approached it, whatever it might be, for it gradually grew on my sight. Towards night it presented the appearance of a huge black wall, ascending into infinite space, and descending into the field of clouds beneath me. Just before sunset there came a rent in these clouds far away to the west, and once more I perceived land; but whether an island or what, I could not tell. I took the bearings by the compass, and found that it was S.S.W., about. In half an hour I was right over this gap or breach in the clouds, but still could not discover whether it was an island or mainland. I knew, however, that I was still drifting to the south and west at a prodigious pace, but whither I knew not. The South-Sea Islands, Australia, New Zealand,—I knew they lay in that direction, and that was all. Before sunset I again swept the horizon with my telescope; but I could not discover any break in the clouds below me, nor could I descend beneath them; indeed, I found that as the coal in my stove burned, the balloon was slowly but surely rising still higher.

Once again right over the ocean: beneath me an utter blank; above me the stars, which twinkled and sparkled in the firmament with preternatural brightness. This night I could not sleep, so intense was the cold, and so painful the difficulty of breathing.

How bitterly I repented of my carelessness in losing the string of the valve! Again and again I felt tempted to tear the silk of the balloon, and allow it to fall to the earth, thus putting an end to my pain,

suspense, and misery. But somehow I conquered the desire, and still held on.

Towards midnight—I still kept my watch going, and the stars gave ample light—I raised myself from my crouching position at the bottom of the car, and looked around me.

The gloomy darkness to the south-west looked more gloomy, blacker, and nearer. As I looked, in fear and trembling, I observed at intervals gleams of lucid light break through the cloud, or whatever it was. Gasping from want of breath, trembling with the piercing cold, I clutched the brandy-flask and endeavoured to drink.

The spirit was frozen to a solid mass of ice. Then despair took possession of me. I cowered beneath my blanket, and, as I thought, lay down to die. How long I had lain in a half-unconscious state I know not, but I was aroused by a sound like that of distant thunder.

I looked up wearily, hopelessly, and cast my eyes in the direction from which the sound seemed to come. There I saw a terrible and awful sight. Beneath me, but at some mile or two's distance to the north-west, was a semicircle of red burning fire. Above this semicircle all was black and gloomy. A vast wall of black cloud seemed to rise from the fire, going right up to heaven. It was the same beneath—a perpendicular black wall and utter darkness. As for the lower part, I knew not what it could be; but the upper portion appeared to tumble and roll about like smoke or thick clouds, and smoke or cloud I concluded it to be. Not a star nor a bit of the sky could I see through its dismal gloom; and as I now came yet nearer and nearer to it, it gradually encroached on the sky and stars, till it occupied nearly half the firmament, which was, as it were, shut out from my view by a wall going, from whence I did not know, into illimitable space.

And now, minute by minute, the roaring increased,

till it resembled the noise of a thousand furnaces blown by thousands of demons.

What could it be? Were the glaring, gleaming fires I saw those of the infernal regions? Or was this a vast volcano? Impossible; for the semicircle of fire stretched miles, from the south to the west. As I approached yet closer to the dark wall of smoke, cloud, or whatever it might be, it seemed to recede before me, always appearing to be at the same distance.

By four o'clock the raging, roaring furnaces appeared to be almost beneath me, while the noise was deafening—awful!

I hid my head, and crouched in the bottom of the car, fully expecting each moment to be precipitated into the flaming abyss. When I again plucked up courage to look out, the flaming fire was right beneath me, lighting up the bottom till it glowed like molten iron.

Casting my eyes to the eastward, I saw to my horror that another black wall was behind and around me—above me.

Blackness around and above, with the flaming, roaring furnaces beneath me!

I was in the regions of eternal night!

CHAPTER VI.

THE REGIONS OF ETERNAL NIGHT

I NOW gave myself up for lost, and buried my head in the opossum cloak, hoping to exclude the dreadful sight and sounds which surrounded me. Still, however, I could not refrain from occasionally looking up fearfully and tremblingly. I noticed on these occasions that the darkness grew yet blacker, and that the air seemed burdened with mephitic, stifling vapour. Beneath me lay a broad field of lurid flame, which I

could just distinguish between the crevices in the wicker ear of the balloon.

After a short time, perceiving that I did not seem to be approaching this terrible fiery abyss, I plucked up courage, and peered over the ear on the view beneath. I looked out but for one moment, and then shrank back in horror. Yes, there could be no doubt of it—and my blood curdled at the thought—I was immediately above the dreadful gates of the infernal regions. I distinguished in that momentary glance a vast mountain of red fire—as it were, red hot—while in the centre of the lurid circle, bright, forked flames shot up, bursting through heavy masses of black smoke, which appeared to be vomited forth in tremendous puffs, as though blown out by some fiery demon. In the midst of the dense masses of smoke, too, I fancied, nay, felt sure, I could distinguish moving figures, turning, twisting, and writhing in all directions. They appeared to be floating about in the smoke, darting hither and thither, but always tending to the flaming gulf in the centre, like moths to a candle: indeed, it seemed to me that they were being drawn into the vortex, notwithstanding their struggles to avoid it. Perhaps it was my fancy: perhaps what I mistook for definite shapes were but the fantastic forms assumed by the smoke. Be that as it may, the thought strongly took possession of my mind, that these phantoms were doomed spirits, slowly but surely tending to the great gulf in the centre, in the same manner as the earth would tend to fall into the sun were the centrifugal force lessened ever so little.

The dismal howlings and roarings, too, I conjectured to proceed from these beings, be they phantoms or what they might.

Of all this I have now but a confused recollection, for I verily believe I was almost in a state of delirium from fear and horror; so that these shapes might have been but the creations of my brain. Of the dreadful smoky darkness and the raging flames, however, there

could be no doubt—that at least was no fancy. And now I felt an unaccountably faint, heavy feeling steal over me. It did not seem like sleep, but rather resembled in its nature a trance, or half-death. Just before I sank into this state I pulled out my watch, wound it up, and looked at the time; it was just six o'clock. This I plainly saw by the light of the flames, but had not sufficient strength to replace it in my pocket. Then all power of will left me, and I lay helpless as a log. My eyes were wide open, and I was unable to close them. My head rested uneasily on the edge of the car, but I found myself utterly unable to move it. I next tried to lift my hand: my will sent forth the order, but my muscles and sinews refused to obey. I tried, and tried, but was unable to move even my little finger; and at last the dreadful truth became plain to me—I was, to all intents and purposes, *dead*. My spirit was in effect as much separated from my body as though I had been buried half a century. My feelings at that moment I can never describe. Again and again I strove to move. In vain. Had my salvation depended on a wink, I could not have helped it. As for the passage of time, I took no note of it—ages seemed to me to elapse while I lay in that horrible trance.

The next thing I noticed was that the darkness grew more intense, while the lurid glare lessened, and at last seemed to disappear. Then to the roaring of the fires, and the dismal howlings which I attributed to the phantoms flitting about in the smoke, succeeded other and still more extraordinary sounds. Though unable to move in the slightest degree, I could still hear and see plainly; and what was most strange, I could see all around me, above me, below me, and behind me, as if I had eyes all over my body.

A strange rushing noise, apparently from some distance, attracted my attention, and gave rise to fresh fears. Gradually it became plainer, as though ap-

proaching ; and all at once I was conscious of some vast dark object moving in the gloom. The rushing sound resembled the roar of a cannon-ball, or rather a thousand cannon-balls, through the air. These strange noises increased both in frequency and violence, till all around me seemed alive with mysterious forms, dashing hither and thither with fearful velocity.

Slowly, and one by one, I noticed many immense dark objects flitting rapidly about in the gloom. Sometimes one of them would dash up a little nearer to the balloon, and then, as if frightened, would as rapidly dash away again.

CHAPTER VII.

THE PHANTOMS WITH THE GLEAMING EYES.

AT last one of these mysterious beings rushed past, within a few yards, at a prodigious pace. Then I noticed that it was a gigantic human form, enveloped in a dark covering, which concealed all but a part of the face. As it passed I saw, with a shudder of horror, two gleaming white eyes glaring on me ; and disappearing in the distance, the last thing to be seen was the white, glistening orbs glaring threateningly over the creature's shoulder.

Soon, however, they appeared to grow bolder. One after another rushed by, each one glaring at me with the same dreadful-looking white eyes as the first. All were enveloped in the same dark covering, so that I could but just discern that their shapes resembled those of human beings.

Now one bolder than the rest approached quite close, paused for a moment, removed the covering from the lower part of its face, and then, with a fearful shriek, darted off again.

Never shall I forget my sensations at that moment. Though utterly unable to move, I felt a cold perspiration break out all over me. My spirit shuddered,

and I felt a deadly feeling of incense cold pervade me.

The eyes of the phantom were, as before, white and glistening; but the face—ah! how can I even describe the horrible face? It was a bright, transparent red—*red-hot*, in fact—and glowed like molten iron. Then the shriek, the dreadful shriek, with which it dashed off in the gloom! Doubtless, reader, you have heard the Irish tradition of the “banshee.” It seemed to me to be the shriek of ten thousand banshees blended into one.

Several now darted up in the same manner, and, apparently growing bolder, paused yet longer each time; gazing as I thought spitefully, yet without fear, on me and my balloon. As I was unable to move, they approached yet nearer, floating around me in a circle, one occasionally coming up close, and then, after a pause, darting away again. By degrees the circle got narrower, and I was surrounded by a whole legion of gigantic dark forms, all with white glistening eyes and red-hot faces. Nearer, yet nearer, they pressed around me, some above, some below, some on all sides; till even, could I have seen any thing in the prevailing darkness, all would have been hid by the legions of them which congregated on all sides.

In the extremity of my horror and terror, I frantically prayed for death, for annihilation,—any thing to relieve me of these dreadful beings.

Now, to put a climax on my terrors, one of them advanced from the close ranks, and came right up to the car. It leaned over me, and—oh, horror!—looking through the red-hot face, I could see the others beyond! The phantom reached forth its hand from beneath the dark shroud or mantle. It, too, was red-hot. It held it towards me, and appeared about to grasp me by the throat. I felt a hot glow, as though from a fire. Nearer, yet nearer, came the outspread fingers, and I felt them scorch me, the eyes all the while gleaming

more fiercely. The hand touched my throat. It was hot, dreadfully hot. With a tremendous effort, I regained command of my will. With a wild cry, I started to my feet, and instantly the whole battalion of phantoms, with terrible howls, dashed away in confusion. I heard the rushing sound as they vanished ; then memory, consciousness, all forsook me, and I sank to the bottom of the car in a deadly swoon. How long I lay in this state I know not ; since, however, I have had reason to believe it must have been at least two days. I was aroused, I believe, partly by a feeling of cold, and partly by the same rushing noise which had before so terrified me. I felt very faint and weak from want of food, and took a draught of brandy ; also a biscuit and a piece of cheese. I remembered the poor little dog I had brought with me, and, thinking to feed him, searched for him ; I found him huddled up in the opossum cloak, cold and stiff, quite dead. The two pigeons had also disappeared. And now I was alone, drifting I knew not whither—and, indeed, to such a pitch of despair had I arrived, that I cared but little.

The darkness was still intense, but I could not discern any longer the gleaming fires over which I had passed. In one direction only could I perceive a faint, pale light, like that preceding the breaking of day. On consulting my compass, I perceived that this was in the south-west.

I had not long recovered my senses before I again distinguished objects moving in the darkness, and ere long I could distinguish the gleaming eyes of my old enemies, whose near approach had caused me to swoon away. I could distinguish vast multitudes of them on all sides, and knew by their rapidly narrowing circles that they were again approaching me. Faint, weary, and sick at heart, I felt tempted to leap from the balloon, and so end my life and my troubles together ; but glancing downwards, I could perceive beneath me a perfect sea of dark forms with gleaming eyes, through

which I must fall in my descent to earth ; if, indeed, I had not passed beyond the sphere of the earth's attraction.

At times I almost thought this must be the case, for otherwise I could not account for the extraordinary sights I had seen and the sounds I had heard. I looked at my watch ; it had stopped ; so I knew that at least twenty-four hours must have elapsed since I had wound it up.

Feeling thirsty, I found, upon examination, that all my water, which had previously been frozen, had been melted by the heat when over the terrible fires, and had been lost.

It was now once more bitterly cold, and I found a slight quantity of the water had trickled upon, and was now frozen to, the wicker-work of the car ; with this I managed to slake my thirst.

The fire in the stove had long been out, and I had no more fuel with which to relight it.

I had a little brandy left, and about half of the small cheese, but no water, for I had already collected the little ice from the car, and melted it in my mouth to quench my thirst.

I have said that I could distinguish in the distance the same shadowy forms which had before so greatly alarmed me. They now again began to close in upon me from all sides. Legions and legions, thousands upon thousands, massed together, pressed slowly but surely towards me.

Again I saw the same dreadful gleaming eyes, and occasionally the same lurid faces. Nearer, nearer they came, till the darkness seemed to be almost lighted up by the wild flashing of their demon eyes.

Again an indescribable horror took possession of me. I saw that I should soon be overwhelmed by their countless thousands.

What was their object ? Were they unholy spirits, enemies to man, who would tear me to pieces for my presumption in entering their domains ?

I knew not; but each moment, as they approached, dashing all the while furiously about and glaring on me, my fear and horror increased to a pitch of unbearable agony.

Suddenly a thought struck me. I observed that by far the densest mass of those terrible beings was below, around me; while above I could distinguish now no white eyes and glowing faces—only the deep, impenetrable blackness; and that was better than such terrible companions. If I could but ascend yet higher, I might perchance avoid them. But how to do so? My ballast had all been thrown out, and I could not rise without lightening the car. A sudden rush made by the owners of the dreadful eyes caused me to shudder and turn pale with fear. My eyes fell upon the body of the little dog. That, at least, would do something, and I threw it forth; but, alas! it was very light, and had but little effect. Next I thought of the iron stove. If I could throw that out, I should undoubtedly shoot up far higher. I was very weak, and could with difficulty move it; but the nearer approach of the terrible phantoms of the night—their wild screams and horrible eyes—endued me with the strength of desperation. With a great effort I lifted it above the edge of the car and let it fall.

I have said that thousands and thousands of my terrible enemies were beneath me, forming a vast sea. Their glowing faces and shining eyes lit up the darkness with a ghostly glare, so that I could see the descent of the iron stove. Down, down it went, right into the mass of forms. I felt myself shooting up in the air, as the balloon was lightened of the stove, on which I still kept my eyes.

I saw it plunge into the dense crowd beneath. They scattered in all directions, shrieking wildly, as if with the utmost terror.

Then, to my great joy, I saw through the opening made in their phalanx, as they fled in all directions from the falling stove, a blaze of bright light, like

that of the sun. Quick as lightning the thought flashed across me, If they scatter at the descent of the stove, they would do the same at the descent of the balloon. But how to descend? that was the question. I had lost the string of the valve, and was now shooting upwards.

Suddenly a desperate expedient suggested itself—I would cut the balloon and let the gas escape!

No sooner thought of than done. I leaped to my feet, seized my knife, and cut a long gash in the belly of the balloon. Out rushed the gas, nearly suffocating me, and compelling me to lie down and bury my head in the blankets and opossum rug. When I looked up, I knew at once we were descending with fearful velocity.

To my joy, I saw the crowd of phantoms scatter in all directions as the balloon whistled through the air in its headlong descent.

“I shall be smashed to pieces,” I thought, with a sigh of relief; “but any thing is better than those terrible creatures of the night.”

Down, down we went, at a speed which took my breath away. Casting my eyes upwards, I could discern an innumerable crowd of dark forms flitting about and descending after me. Then, looking down, I saw the same bright light which had given me so much joy. Doubtless it was the light of the glorious sun, and I should at least gaze on it once more before being dashed to pieces.

Strange to say, although falling with such fearful velocity, I felt no fear of death. That was overcome by joy at my deliverance from the gloomy forms with the dreadful eyes.

Down, down we went, at increasing speed. I could scarcely draw my breath. In a few moments we passed out of the darkness into a light of dazzling brilliancy. For a moment my eyes could not bear the glare; but when they were a little used to it, I beheld a glorious scene.

Far beneath me, bathed in light, I saw stretched

glorious fertile plains, silvery lakes, gorgeous palaces glistening and sparkling with gems,—in short, a picture of brightness such as surely no other mortal but myself had ever gazed upon.

As if to enhance all this glorious brightness, and the flashing of all the colours of the rainbow, I beheld, on casting my eyes upwards, the dense blackness from which I had emerged. I even fancied I could distinguish the shadowy forms flitting about near the edge, but in no case coming out into the light, as though they were doomed ever to inhabit those gloomy regions of eternal night.

Downwards we rushed through the air with fearful velocity. In a few more seconds, then, I should be dashed to the ground. I had but just time to breathe one short prayer. We are close to the ground. My last moment has come; in another second I shall be dashed to pieces—*Crash!*

CHAPTER VIII.

FAIRY-LAND.

AFTER making the gash in the balloon with my knife the gas rushed out with prodigious force, and in a very short time the silk was nearly empty. Immediately before reaching the ground beneath me, I cast a glance upwards, and seeing this, imagined that my fall would be so rapid as inevitably to dash me to pieces.

The shock on striking the ground was rather violent; but, to my great surprise, I found myself uninjured, and the balloon rebounded some twenty or thirty yards in the air again. This was partly owing to the ear having been upset, and every thing in it thrown out, thus again lightening it.

My astonishment for the first few moments was so

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great as to prevent me looking out on the aspect of affairs beneath me.

After my rebound, the balloon floated calmly on at about twenty yards from the ground, and I had a good opportunity of surveying the scene beneath me. But before I say any thing about what I saw, I will speak of what I felt.

When I approached near the earth—if, indeed, this was our earth—in my first rapid descent, I felt a strange tingling sensation all over my body—a warm, thrilling, and intensely pleasant sensation, of which, at the time, I took but little notice, expecting to be dashed to pieces the next moment. Now, however, that I was relieved from the fear of immediate death, it was a different thing, and I gave way to the pleasing sort of excitement which pervaded my whole frame. I had once breathed nitrous oxide, or laughing gas, as it is commonly called, and the warm, thrilling sensation which this causes bore a great resemblance to the pleasurable excitement that I now felt. My cheeks were flushed, and my eyes shone with unwonted lustre. My hearing was more acute, and my sight much keener, while every other faculty seemed quickened also.

The brilliant colours in the glorious landscape beneath me grew each moment yet more brilliant, and soon there arose on my ears sweet, melodious, musical sounds, as of the tinkling of fairy bells mingled with the soft murmurs of the *Æolian* harp. These sounds, I soon discovered, were not mere strains of music, but were articulate—that is to say, I could distinguish words, which, though I could not understand, were all harmonious, and sung with a pleasing cadence.

Looking out on the plain beneath me, of a deep, rich green, and spangled all over with flowers of every hue, I perceived a vast number of fairy-like looking creatures darting backwards and forwards, leaping, bounding, and all gazing up at me, with cries which I took to be those of wonder,

I saw that these fairy-like beings were in mortal guise, like myself; but I much doubted at the time whether they were indeed mortal. They looked brighter, fairer, handsomer, and more graceful than any men, or women either, whom I had ever seen. Their very attire, too, seemed to me to partake more of fairy-land than of sober earth. All wore tunics of a fine blue material, with cloaks or mantles of glistening white, which floated about, and appeared to be at once as light as gossamer and as glossy as silk. Some of them wore longer tunics than the others, and had, besides, bands of purple round their waists. These, from their forms, their lovely faces, which I could distinctly discern, and also from their long, luxuriant hair, I conjectured rightly to be women.

I noticed as I was being drifted slowly by the breeze, that the whole crowd, male and female, was following me, apparently both delighted and astonished. Wishing to see in which direction I was drifting, I consulted my compass, which had not fallen out of the car.

To my utter astonishment, it refused to act. It did not point in any particular direction, but remained fixed where it was first placed.

It was long before I could believe that so universal a law as that of the needle tending to the pole was suspended; but such was the fact, and it confirmed me in my idea that I had either reached some other planet, or was in fairy-land.

I now once more turned my eyes downwards, and observed more closely the extraordinary beings who thronged those glorious plains. I observed that some of the ladies with the long tunics, the purple bands, and flowing hair, wore, instead of a white mantle, one of glistening silver, studded with pale-blue stars. These also bore something in their hands, which might have been either a wand or sceptre. They had also circlets of silver around their heads, and I at once perceived that they were persons of authority by their gestures, which seemed always to be

obeyed by the others, and the uniform respect paid to them.

It amazed me much, with only my earthly experience, to observe that all these were ladies—not one of them being men. Nor did any of the men among all the multitudes exercise or attempt to exercise any authority, so far as I could discern.

Many of these ladies with the silver mantles appeared to be beckoning to me to descend; but the gas had now ceased escaping; and although the balloon was more than half-empty, it still did not descend, but, if any thing, continued to rise slowly. This astonished me; but I could not help it.

Suddenly, one of these—who, in addition to the silver mantle, the purple band, the circlet of silver, and the wand, wore also a silver star on a diadem above the forehead—advanced rapidly from the crowd who were following me, and faced about. Then she gave several exclamations, but in the most dulcet tones; indeed, the sound seemed something between the thrill of a harp-string and the warble of a flute, rather than a voice. Whatever these words might be, they were evidently commands, for instantly the crowd halted, and all the men formed themselves into companies and battalions, while the ladies with the silver robes placed themselves in front, each appearing to take subordinate command of a certain number of men.

Next I heard a thrilling sound proceed from the lips of the lady with the diadem—a sound like that of a clarionet, only infinitely softer and finer.

Prodigious was the effect of this last command,—for I knew it must be such. At that moment the whole multitude was drawn up like an army in battle array.

No sooner had the word gone forth from her who seemed to be the chief, than one division, battalion, regiment—call it what you like—started at the run after my retreating balloon. A burst of music, the

like of which I had never before heard, swelled on the air. Onwards they came, I all the while gazing in astonishment at the strange sight, but not imagining for a moment that they could reach me.

Imagine, then, my amazement as, with one accord, when almost beneath me, they all bounded up in the air like a flock of pigeons. In an instant they were above and around my balloon; many hands seized the car, whilst one, seizing the anchor-rope, darted away with it, and, at least a hundred joining him, descended to earth, dragging me after them. All the others also descended; and as many as were able seized the rope, and commenced pulling the balloon along at a run.

I was lost in wonder at this extraordinary proceeding, and now felt more than ever certain that I must be in fairy-land. They had not wings, nor, indeed, did they seem to fly, but appeared rather to reach me at my elevation of at least seventy feet by a prodigious bound, descending to the earth again lightly, buoyantly, and without inconvenience. They ran forwards at a great rate, dragging the balloon after them, which at times assumed an almost horizontal position. The rest of the crowd, which was continually being swelled by fresh arrivals, followed in our wake, while peals of music and laughter came upwards. I had been thus dragged for some quarter of an hour, and, from the pace at which we went, must have passed over some miles of ground, when we came to the borders of a lake or river of what appeared to be water. I say, appeared to be water; for, although in a manner clear and transparent like that which I had always seen, it had a rich rose tint, the effect of which was most beautiful. The lady with the silver mantle, star, and diadem, had all the while preceded those dragging the balloon, as also did those ladies with the silver mantle only. She now again gave a loud, clear, musical word of command.

Instantly there was a dead halt—those who had hold of the anchor-rope pulling the balloon gently towards the ground. I can scarcely describe my feelings at that moment; they were partly pleasurable, partly wondering, and perhaps a very little bit fearful. Still, however, so mild and beautiful was the aspect of all these strange creatures, especially the ladies, whose lovely faces were radiant with smiles, that I could not feel much afraid. The instant the car touched the ground, I was seized—not roughly—by many pairs of hands, and lifted out. Then, at a word from the lady with the silver mantle and diadem, all fell back, and left me standing in the centre of an immense circle,—all gazing and wondering at my strange appearance.

My brain was in a whirl, and it was with difficulty I could persuade myself I was not in a dream. The tingling, glowing sensation still continued, to which was added a feeling of buoyancy, as though I also, like the mysterious beings by which I was surrounded, could leap high in the air. But this idea I quickly dismissed, and felt more than ever persuaded that fairies and fairy-tales were not all imagination; but that, in very truth, I had discovered a country peopled by these creatures.

I now had ample time to look around me. I first looked aloft, thinking to discover the sun, or, at least, the sky. I was disappointed. I beheld floating about above me masses of clouds of a deep purple colour, all of them emitting a bright, white, dream-light—a something between moonlight, sunlight, and red-fire. Between these masses of light-emitting clouds I could discern at a vast distance the gloomy blackness from which I had descended, the dreadful “regions of eternal night,” as I have since learned these were. I even fancied that I could see occasionally come into view some of the dread phantoms with the gleaming eyes and red-hot faces, which so horribly terrified me. Looking beneath me, on the ground, I found myself

standing on turf of the most brilliant green tint, and of a velvety softness and fineness; and surrounding me on all sides, but at a distance of some twenty yards, were the strange beings who had brought me where I was. The blue and white mantles of the majority of these looked handsome, and shone brightly in the strange light beaming from the clouds. But how can I ever describe the brilliant effect of the silver mantles and purple robes of the ladies who stood, apparently by virtue of their superior rank, nearer to me? All of them were handsome, and of a dazzling fairness, which I had never seen equalled; but the ladies with the silver mantles, now that I saw them close, seemed of inconceivable loveliness. When I had gazed long, wonderingly, and ardently on these beautiful creatures, I turned my eyes towards the lady to whom all seemed to pay obedience—I mean the one with the diadem and single star on her forehead.

She was nearer to me than the others, and I had a full opportunity of observing the surpassing beauty of her features, the nobility of her carriage, and the elegance of her form. Her hair was long and luxuriant, of a bright golden colour, and hanging in profusion down her back. The silver cloak was thrown back over her shoulders, allowing the matchless symmetry of her figure, encased in the blue tunic, fitting tight on the body, to be seen to the best advantage. Her eyes were large and of a deep blue, her complexion the most dazzlingly brilliant you could possibly imagine.

For a space of fully five minutes I stood the centre of this vast group, the lady with the star and diadem nearest to me. During that time my thoughts were occupied in endeavouring to account for the marvellous things I saw by natural causes. But, though loth to believe in the supernatural, I could not persuade my bewildered reason that all I now saw was not either a dream or fairy-land. A dream I knew it was not; and was forced to believe that all I saw—the plains, the

black clouds above, and the fantastic beings by whom I was surrounded—were the results of enchantment. Nor is it wonderful that I should have come to this conclusion; for how otherwise could I account for the prodigious leaps which these beings so easily made? How, too, could I account for my not being dashed to pieces in my fall? Again, the whole aspect of the country and the inhabitants proclaimed at once to my mind that it was no mortal scene on which I gazed. It was not till long afterwards that I learned the truth, and was convinced that this was neither fairy-land, nor the people, bright and fairy-like as they appeared, fairies; but men and women, of flesh and blood like myself.

As for the gloomy regions of eternal night through which I had passed, and where I had seen such dreadful sights, I was afterwards inclined to set down a great deal to the delirious fever in which terror and the mephitic atmosphere had thrown me. At the time, however, I fully believed that I was in the hands of supernatural beings or magicians.

I have said that I stood for some five minutes the centre of this vast crowd of what I thought fairies. The lady with the diadem and star gazed long and curiously at me, then uttered a few words.

Instantly I was seized, by some who advanced from the crowd, and conducted to the edge of the lake, or river, of tinted water. Then I was pushed in. This did not cause me any fresh alarm, as it was not done with violence, and I guessed it was for the purpose of washing. Then, too, I was a good swimmer, and did not fear being drowned. Imagine my dismay and terror, however, when I found myself sink to the bottom like a stone, in spite of my vigorous attempts to swim. In vain I struck out, and struggled desperately to rise to the surface by the use of my arms. When, however, in my struggles, my feet touched the bottom, I found that I could spring easily to the surface, only again, however, to sink. All this time I

had been pertinaciously holding breath, as I had been accustomed to do in diving in our English streams. At last, however, I could no longer resist the unconquerable effort of nature, and attempted to draw breath. I was almost in a state of stupor from suffocation, and mentally prayed that death might end my sufferings. Judge, then, of my astonishment, when, instead of the choking gasp which I had always felt when before I had, accidentally or purposely, endeavoured to breathe under water, I found no difficulty in so doing. I breathed the water in and out of my lungs without difficulty, and the feeling of suffocation was at once removed. It was not water at all, such as I had before seen, but a subtle fluid, half-way between a liquid and a gas. This I at once discovered, and could now account for my being unable to swim. The fluid, though heavier than air, was yet so much lighter than water that it was impossible to float in it. I now found that I could walk along the bottom without much difficulty; and accordingly made my way, as best I could, back to the shore of this strange lake. No sooner had I scrambled up the bank than I was again seized by many hands, and all my clothes taken off. I was quickly dressed in a suit of beautifully soft texture and fine material, such as those around me wore. Before this process commenced, I observed that all those whom I rightly judged to be females retired, and I was both undressed and dressed by the men. This fact caused me to waver in my opinion that I was in the company of supernatural beings. It was so thoroughly natural and human, that I felt somewhat reassured, and the feeling of vague terror diminished. No sooner was I dressed in the tunic and trousers of fine material, which all these people wore, than a way was opened through the crowd, and I was again led into the presence of the lady with the star and diadem. In my mind I immediately named her the "Princess;" for such she seemed to be, by the deference and authority paid her. By degrees I began to renew the use

of my faculties, which had been for the time dulled and bewildered by the wonders I beheld. But when once the idea dawned upon me that all I saw was real, and neither supernatural nor a dream, I set to work accounting for the various phenomena. It was just possible, I thought, that what I fancied was water was not water, but something between water and air, which might be breathed for a time without destroying life.

Then these creatures, the inhabitants of what I thought at one time to be an enchanted valley, might be mortals like myself. I could not only see them, but could feel them ; and this latter fact was contrary to all I had heard or read of the nature of ghosts and fairies. Altogether, I became gradually more reassured, and decided that my balloon had been wafted by the winds to a distant and unknown country. But there was one fact for which I found it impossible to account. This was, the prodigious bounds, or flying leaps, which these people would take. But imagine my astonishment when I found that I, too, was endowed with this singular power. As I was being led along, after having been dressed, to the presence of the Princess, I saw before me a chasm or deep ditch, some four or five feet across. All those around and in front of me leaped over this without the slightest effort ; and as I saw I was evidently expected to follow their example, I took a short run, and made a spring sufficient, I thought, just to land me on the other side. But, to my intense amazement, I sprang high in the air, and landed lightly, and without shock, full twenty yards further than I thought. The sensation was most extraordinary, as I flew through the air, and not unlike that experienced in swinging. I now felt certain that all I saw was real, and neither imaginary nor supernatural. This fact made the extraordinary leaping power which I had been suddenly endowed with the more wonderful. To make sure I was not deceived, I made a light spring straight up. Under

ordinary circumstances I should not have risen above two feet from the ground, but on this occasion I bounded with ease full ten yards high ; and it was not so much the height to which I so easily leaped which astonished me, but the gentleness with which I descended. It appeared that either I had suddenly turned lighter and more buoyant, or that the attraction of gravitation was in this strange country lessened. No sooner did this idea present itself than I decided it was the true solution of this marvel. While I was yet thinking of this I found myself again in the presence of the lady with the silver mantle, star, and diadem. Then, for the first time, she looked me full in the face, and evidently addressed me.

Alas ! though I could tell by the expression of her face, and the inquiring look in her eyes, that she was asking a question, yet I could not form the most distant idea of what she meant, for the words were strange, and, though very soft and melodious, resembled no language I had ever heard spoken. She quickly discovered by my puzzled look that I did not understand, and with a gesture of disappointment spoke to those by whom I was surrounded, and I was led away gently, but evidently as a prisoner. In the distance I could discern the towers and buildings of what was apparently a large and splendid city, glistening white, as though built of marble. Our progress was rapid, and in the space of a few minutes we arrived at a splendid city of palace-like buildings, apparently of white marble. I was conducted through many streets, until we came to a large open space, where was a very lofty and grand building, which I conjectured to be the palace of the king of the place, or of some person of rank. I was now sufficiently convinced that these were mortal people, and not fairies ; but I was utterly at a loss to make out what this strange country was, and where it was situated. As we passed through the streets of the city, I noticed that, although there were crowds of people, there were

no animals of any description. Not a horse, dog, or bird was to be seen ; nor, indeed, any living thing but men and women. Another fact now struck me. In all the crowds I saw no one either old or ugly. Some were handsomer and taller than others, but on no single face could I discern any indications of age or decay. This puzzled me much at first, but did not excite my wonder so much as the respirable water and the extraordinary powers of locomotion possessed by these people, and by myself also. Now, I felt no change in my own person, nor did I believe there was any. How, then, could I account for the singular power I possessed, and of which there could be no doubt ? for as I walked it was with difficulty I could keep on the ground. The slightest spring or stronger step than common sent me flying upwards. The effect of this, although laughable, gave me much annoyance. Arrived at the large white building, or palace, I was led along various corridors, all of white marble, to a large hall in the centre. Here, seated on a raised dais, or throne, I saw a grave, handsome man, of lofty and dignified appearance. On each side stood two rows of female guards, exactly similar in appearance to those I had already seen. Between these two rows I was led up to the foot of the throne, when one of those who had brought me addressed him whom I conjectured to be king or governor. I could understand neither his words nor the reply, but noticed that the king appeared much surprised, and gazed attentively at me. After a short time thus spent he spoke a few words, and I was immediately led away. I was conducted to a small house near the palace, and was given to understand by signs that that was to be my abode. Food and drink were placed before me, and then my conductors left me to myself. There were various dishes of food, but all was strange to me. It was not meat, that I was certain of, although I could not tell its nature. It was, however, very palatable, and I did not fail to make a hearty repast. The

liquid, too, which was in a large crystal goblet, was unlike any thing I had ever before tasted. It was of a deep purple colour, and I judged it to be wine of some description. When I had made a hearty meal, I began to look around me and speculate as to the nature of all I saw. I found myself in a house of but one storey, built of white stone or marble, and containing three rooms. The third of these rooms was furnished with a couch and pillows of soft fine material, and this I guessed was to be my sleeping apartment. There were no doors to the house, only a curtain hanging over the entrance to each room. Light was admitted by several windows reaching from the roof nearly to the ground. Altogether, the place was more like a marble summer-house than the dwellings I had been accustomed to. I found that there was no guard placed over me, and that I was at liberty to move about as I pleased. Accordingly, I left the place after attentively noting the situation, and wandered about in the city.

I felt strangely lonesome among all the crowds of people who thronged the spacious streets. To all intents and purposes I was alone. I could not speak a word to ask a question or communicate my thoughts and feelings. It was a terrible, an awful idea. Alone in the midst of thousands in a strange land, where the very laws of nature seemed to be changed, and the great principle, the subject of Newton's discoveries and researches, partially suspended. Yes, I had come to the conclusion that the law of gravitation, in obedience to which all ponderable bodies fall to the ground, was modified, to a great extent, in this strange land. Thus it was that when the balloon fell I was not dashed to pieces. The power of attraction was sufficient to cause me to descend, but not with violent force. For the same reason I was enabled, by a very slight spring, to leap high in the air. It was not till long afterwards that I discovered the reason of this, but I may as well at once enlighten the reader. I

afterwards had good reason to believe that I had penetrated the secret as to where and what this strange country was. My balloon had been borne by the wind in a north-westerly direction across the great Pacific Ocean, and above the Australian Continent. Now the interior of Australia has never been explored. No white man has ever penetrated its vast solitudes, though many have attempted it, and paid the penalty with their lives. I believe that this country, where I had accidentally come, was in the centre of a vast circle of volcanoes on the summits of mountains, miles above the surface of the sea. The dark mass which I called the regions of eternal night, was caused by the smoke, ashes, and vapour given off by these burning mountains, which formed a barrier, shutting this country as effectually from all intercourse with the rest of the world as though it were another planet.

I afterwards partially learned the language of the country, and was informed that their wise men had among them a tradition of another world beyond the glowing blackness which surrounded them on all sides, but no one had ever been beyond, nor, till I came in my balloon, had they ever had a visitor from this outer world, whose existence these traditions affirmed. I had been in the place quite two months, as I reckoned, before I could speak the language sufficiently well to gain information, or in turn to give it. When I could converse with these people I found that they were in a state of primitive innocence. They knew nothing of the sciences, and their manufacturing skill was very small. But then they needed it not. Every thing existed in profusion and ready formed.

The metals—iron, gold, and silver, &c.—were found in large quantities, and in such a state as to be immediately available for use. Food grew in abundance, and required but little preparation. A large species of grape furnished wine already fermented.

Speaking of food, I now discovered that there was none, except of a vegetable nature. There were no animals of any description, no life except human ; and it was with the utmost wonder they listened to my accounts of the birds, beasts, and fishes which peopled our world.

The extraordinary power I, in common with all the inhabitants, had of leaping from the ground was easily explained. The attraction of gravitation is simply the attraction of all masses of matter to each other. Small bodies fall to the earth because of the greater attractive power of the larger mass. But underneath our feet in this country there existed, I was informed, a vast chasm instead of the solid earth. This chasm extended to the centre of the globe, and thus the only attractive power exercised was by the solid matter on the other side of the centre. Thus the solid matter beneath our feet was decreased by one-half, and the remaining half was at an immense distance. No sun and stars were ever visible, as they were shut out by the black clouds and vapours. The light, which for a long time puzzled me, was caused by a sort of aurora borealis, which served as a substitute for the light of the sun.

As to the phantoms with the gleaming eyes, these people knew nothing of them, and I am inclined to believe that they were the creations of my disordered brain, and that while in the black clouds I was delirious. My relations as to the wonders of the countries beyond seemed to inspire these people with the greatest astonishment, but they shrunk with horror from the thought of endeavouring to leave their favoured land and penetrate beyond.

Their religion taught them that the attempt would be impious, and insure certain destruction ; so, as the very thought was so hateful to them, I was careful to avoid for the future all allusion to the subject.

The lady with the star and diadem, who, as I conjectured, was the king's daughter, was my constant companion. She listened greedily to my tales of the

great world, and I fancied that in her the same repugnance to the thought of visiting it did not exist. Her great beauty, gentleness, and intelligence caused me to become deeply enamoured of her. I have not space here to relate all the wonderful things I saw and heard during the two years I remained in this country, but may, perhaps, some day give a more detailed account thereof, especially as it is my intention again to visit that wondrous land.

At the end of two years an earnest longing possessed me to return to my friends and parents. I thought of my mother, my brothers, and sisters, and resolved at all risks to return once more. My balloon had been carefully preserved, and I discovered that at a certain place hydrogen gas issued from the earth in large quantities. My idea was to inflate my balloon, and ascend, and trust to chance for being borne back over the burning mountains to some inhabited country. To this desire I should have experienced no opposition from even the king or any of the inhabitants. But my ambition did not stop here. I conceived the audacious idea of taking with me the beautiful princess with whom I had become so deeply enamoured.

Her name, translated into English, was "Glorious Golden Hair," from the rich and profuse golden tresses with which she was adorned.

When I mentioned my audacious project to her, she at first was filled with horror ; but when she found I was determined to attempt it, she threw herself in my arms, and with many tears consented to leave father, friends, and country, and risk this desperate enterprise with me.

It was a cruel and an ungrateful act on my part, after the kindness and hospitality with which I had been treated by the king and all the inhabitants.

But I must defer the relation of this almost criminal attempt of mine, its failure, and my ignominious expulsion from this wonderful country where I had

been so kindly treated, my return to the outer world, and my adventures "Down in the Sea."

CHAPTER IX.

I AM BANISHED FROM THE COUNTRY WHERE I HAVE LIVED TWO YEARS, AND AM FORCED TO ASCEND AGAIN IN MY BALLOON.

WHEN once I had conceived the project of escaping from this country, and taking with me its greatest jewel—the beautiful golden-haired girl, whom I had persuaded to accompany me—I wasted no time in carrying it into execution. As I have before said, the balloon which had brought me here had been carefully preserved, and I knew would require but little repair.

I contrived, without exciting suspicion, to visit the place where it was kept, and saw that in half an hour I could repair the hole and make it again fit for use. As for the hydrogen gas for inflating it, I knew of a place, about twelve miles only from the city, where it issued from the ground; so that, after taking my balloon there, all I should have to do would be to connect the neck with the stream of gas.

After much thought, I concluded that I could best attain my end by artifice. Accordingly, I proposed to the king that I should amuse and delight them by exhibiting the wonderful machine by which I had come to their country. I was held in great honour there, and my proposal was gladly accepted, and every facility was given me. Now, my plan was as follows: I would get every thing in readiness to ascend, making them believe it was only for a short distance. I could conceal food and water in the ear of the balloon, and after two or three small ascents, could watch my opportunity, suddenly seize the princess, lift her in the car, cut the cord, throw out all ballast, and shoot up in the air far beyond danger of pursuit.

I imparted this notable scheme to my intended companion, and, not without difficulty, gained her consent, in spite of her terror and timidity.

I scarcely know how it was, but desperate, almost hopeless as the enterprise was, I felt no fear. It was true that I should have to rely wholly on chance as to where I should be carried to, even when I had made good my escape ; but I had so thoroughly made up my mind to the attempt, that I ceased longer to think on the subject, convinced that I should succeed.

The first part of my scheme went well enough. The balloon was inflated, and, amidst shouts of pleasure and wonder, and the sound of sweet music, I ascended up in the air several times, descending again after remaining a few minutes. At last, after several of these little attempts, I thought the time had come for the finish of the affair. I managed to descend close to the place where, a little aloof from the crowd, stood the princess. My heart beat rapidly as I looked upon her in all her glorious beauty—timid, but not shrinking from the part she had to perform.

I allowed the balloon to float slowly past her, the car just touching on the ground. Then, when near enough, I suddenly seized her in my arms, placed her in the car, and commenced to throw out ballast. Unfortunately, I could not do so fast enough to shoot very rapidly up. There was a prodigious consternation among the crowd of inhabitants as they saw me sailing away, bearing with me the pride of the land—the “Glorious Golden Hair.”

But astonishment soon gave place to fury. I heard the king shout out some words of command ; I redoubled my efforts to throw out ballast. Up—up I go : alas, however, not fast enough ; and the next instant a hundred forms, bounding from the earth, cling around the balloon, and drag it down.

All was lost : I had made my venture, and failed.

My companion seemed stupefied with terror and grief. While I was endeavouring to lighten the bai-

loon by throwing out the ballast, she crouched down, and, trembling all over, hid her face. I had one consolation, however ; no one supposed that she was a party to the attempt. It was thought that I had endeavoured to carry her off by force—against her will.

I know not what my punishment would have been for this attempt—something very terrible, I doubt not, for the king's brow was as black as night, and the features of all these people, usually so mild-looking, now wore an expression of furious rage. I heard the king give an order in a loud, terrible voice. Instantly I was seized, and was being dragged away, when Glorious Golden Hair, rushing before her father, said some words in an excited tone, at the same time pointing to me. The king looked angry and vexed ; but at a sign I was brought before him, and he thus addressed me in stern terms :

“ Inhabitant of a strange land, you came among us in a mysterious way. We sought not to know who or what you were, but treated you with all hospitality and kindness. For two years we have fed and clothed you, and you have been treated in every way as though you had been my own son. By the criminal attempt you have just made to carry off one of my subjects—my own beloved daughter—you deserve the most terrible punishment known among us. Answer ! have you ought to say for yourself ?”

I was unable to reply a word, so ashamed and crestfallen did I feel.

“ You sought to carry off by force, probably to perish in the clouds of eternal night, the joy and pride of our land, and should rightly pay the terrible penalty. But know, O stranger, that whatever may be the case in the world beyond, of which you boast so much, with us justice is always done. It is a sacred law among us that any person to whom we have once made a present is for ever sacred and safe from harm. It is well for you. What is that you wear around your neck and on your hand ?”

I remembered that on one occasion the king had given me a glittering ornament, whose nature and value I was ignorant of ; this I wore around my neck. The princess had also given me a gold ring with one large stone of a deep purple colour ; this I wore on my finger. Unable to reply a word, I awaited the decision of my judge.

“Stranger ! those ornaments and my daughter’s clemency, who, notwithstanding the outrage you attempted, herself pleads for you, are your safeguards. Go your way ; you are banished for ever from this land. Take your strange machine, and leave us.”

But now, strange to say I had little desire to go. I looked on my mistress, and saw the tears gather in her beautiful eyes. I now begged for pardon, and to be allowed to remain ; but the king was inexorable. He himself saw me placed in the car of my balloon, which was held down by the anchor rope. He was deaf to all my entreaties, and waved his hand impatiently for me to be gone.

Then the princess spoke in soft dulcet tones, which thrilled my heart. The king listened, nodded assent, and then said :

“Listen, stranger from a distant land. How you came here we know not, except by your own account. Nor do we know how you will regain your own land. You ask to be allowed to remain : you are unworthy ; and the least punishment for your crime is banishment. Nevertheless, my daughter has again interceded for you. I have never yet refused her any thing, and now grant her request ; which is, that if ever you, after visiting your own lands, can succeed by means of your flying machines, or by any other means, in again finding your way here, you shall be free to remain. Moreover, I promise to grant the first request you shall make. Now go.” Then at a signal the rope was let go, and the balloon, lightened of ballast, shot swiftly aloft, and in less than five minutes was again in the black clouds ; the beautiful plains and lakes of the

land beneath were hid from view, and in place thereof a heavy murky gloom around—above—below me.

Thus, after a two years' residence in this strange land, I set out on my return journey,—not knowing whither I should be borne, utterly at the mercy of the winds, a mere speck in space.

CHAPTER X.

AFTER MUCH SUFFERING, I AM BORNE AWAY BY MY BALLOON,
AND DESCEND NEAR A LARGE CITY.

ALL confidence—almost all hope—had now left me, and I gave way to despair. The contrast between the utter darkness now and the glorious brightness I had left was very terrible. Then again, as I ascended higher and higher, the cold grew yet more intense, and now I had no stove to warm me. The opossum cloak and blanket, however, I still had, and in these I wrapped myself, resolved to await my fate passively; and as I felt the intense, biting cold, and the difficulty of breathing, my cruelty in attempting to subject a delicate girl to such hardships presented itself with full force. How could she be expected to survive cold which almost froze the blood in my veins?

I sank into a state of half sleep, half stupefaction, and took no note of time. The same mephitic vapours from which I had so nearly perished two years ago again assailed me, and my breathing became more and more laboured and painful. I was incapable of eating, neither was I troubled with thirst; and thus, crouching down, wrapped up in blanket and cloak, days—I know not how many—passed on; at last I sank into a state of complete insensibility, and remember no more, till, suddenly waking, I found myself in broad daylight, with the glorious sun, which I had not seen for so long, streaming full upon me. I staggered to my feet, and gazed around and beneath me,

when I discovered I was floating above a vast sheet of white clouds, on which the sun glistened and sparkled gloriously.

I pulled the rope, the gas rushed out, and I began to descend rapidly. In a few minutes I entered the clouds, and quickly passing through them, strained my eyes in order to discover, if possible, where I was, and whether I had sea or earth beneath me. One glance was sufficient; for there below, stretched, as far as the eye could reach, what appeared, and I knew must be, a vast continent.

I now threw out more ballast, and, remaining suspended at a height of about two miles, had a good view of the country. I discovered, consulting my compass, and watching the shadows of the clouds as they passed over the earth beneath me, that I was being carried rapidly in a south-easterly direction, and knew, from the position of the sun, that it must be early morning, so that I had the whole day before me. This was a source of joy for me, as I could choose my place for descending. I did not wish to come down in an uninhabited part, and I judged the ground beneath me to be entirely so, for I could discover no signs of man or man's work. I watched eagerly all around for some indications of human life, but without success till long after noon, when I noticed several cleared places in the forest beneath me, and also fancied I could occasionally discern a hut or house.

Soon these clearings grew more frequent; and ere long I could make out with certainty huts and farm-buildings. Not far away to the eastward I saw a blue line, which I judged to be the sea. Nor was I wrong, for in about half an hour I could make out the broad ocean, from which a creek or harbour ran into the land, and in this creek or harbour I could see many vessels. Then, with a prayer of thankfulness, I pulled the valve-string, and resolved to descend. I had, by the blessing of Providence, been borne by the wind

to a civilised land, after an absence of more than two years. My progress to the eastward was so rapid, that in a few minutes I could discern on the shores of the harbour a large city, built principally of white stone. Not only was I ignorant of what this city was, but even of what was the very land beneath me—whether Europe, Asia, Africa, or America. My descent was so very rapid that I threw out all ballast lest I should be dashed suddenly to the earth. This retarded my descent; and, passing over a road, I floated gently down into a wood of large trees. The balloon caught in the branches of one of these, was torn, and, as the gas rushed out, fell rather heavily to the ground. Though the shock was considerable, I was not hurt, but was quickly on my feet. As for the balloon, I resolved to leave it where it was, for I wanted it no more. I had, for the present, had quite enough of aeronautics. Accordingly, I left the great silk bag—the labour of so many months, and the cause of such strange adventures—flapping about in the wind, and tearing itself to pieces against the trees, and made my way through the wood towards where I had seen the road.

I reached this in about a quarter of an hour, and, climbing over some bushes and rails, turned to the left, and walked, as I guessed, towards the city. I saw many vehicles both before and behind me, and soon an open carriage passed me. The inmates—two ladies and a gentleman—gazed at me as they passed, apparently in the utmost astonishment; but imagine my joy when, listening to their exclamations of wonder, I heard the English tongue! It sounded quite strange to me, not having heard it for more than two years; but, nevertheless, no music could be sweeter. Their wonder now called my attention to my strange attire—the tunic and cloak worn by the inhabitants of the land I had left, and of extraordinary and unknown material. Then I had no hat or cap, and instead of boots a pair of sandals. It was not strange that they stared at me.

However, I resolved to make the best of it, and get rigged out in a civilised fashion as soon as possible. But then I suddenly remembered I had no money. What was to be done? I thought of the ornament given me by the king; that might be valuable,—in all probability it was so. I resolved, then, at once to find out a jeweller's, and offer it him for sale. The other—the ring given me by my lost love—I swore that death alone should part me from.

I walked quickly on, disregarding the astonishment my strange appearance created, and hurried into a small jeweller's shop on the outskirts of the town. I produced the ornament,—ten jewels set in a circle of gold,—and asked him the value, and whether he would purchase. His surprise at my strange appearance was great, but his astonishment and bewilderment on examining the jewels were prodigious.

"Young man," said he, "do you know what these stones are?"

"No, I do not," replied I; "can you tell me?"

"Where did you get them?"

"It would be too long a story now; let it suffice that they were given me by the king or chief of a distant nation."

Again he examined the stones.

"There is only one stone here which I have ever seen before,—that one is a diamond, and is worth several hundred pounds. The others are evidently precious stones; but though I have been in the business thirty years, I never before saw any in the least like them."

I then proposed to the jeweller that he should make me an immediate advance of money, and retain the stones till he could ascertain their value. This he willingly agreed to do, and gave me fifty pounds in English sovereigns, taking a receipt from me, and also, at my request, giving one.

My great object was to provide myself with suitable clothing; for however exquisite the material of those I wore, the strange fashion and colour caused

boundless astonishment and curiosity. Indeed, in a few minutes I had quite a crowd following at my heels, and was only too glad to dive into the first clothes shop I could see. As the crowd had followed, and stood about the door, staring in, I asked the proprietor, an old Jew, to show me into the back-room, as I wished to try on some clothes.

He looked at me with evident curiosity, but said nothing, probably too wise to wish offending a customer, and opening the door of the back-parlour, invited me in. I selected a pilot-cloth suit, good strong boots, blue sailor's shirt, and cloth cap. These I hastily put on, and requested the old man to tie my others up in a bundle. As he did so, he could not repress an exclamation of surprise as he felt and examined the texture. Again and again he rubbed the stuff between his fingers, and even put on his glasses for a closer inspection. But evidently he could not satisfy himself, so he was obliged to ask me.

"My tear poy, vat is these clothes made of? Cloth—no—too fine for cloth; cotton—no—too soft for cotton or linen; silk—no—dere is no silk dere—it is more petter as silk. Holy Abraham!" he exclaimed, turning up his eyes, "vat then is they?"

I smiled, and informed him they were made from a new material in a distant country.

"Vat is dat country?" he asked eagerly. "I could do goot business there."

But even had I been so inclined, I could not have told him; for I have no name for the wonderful country I had visited, nor did I know where it was; and was even in the same state of ignorance as to what was this city I was now in.

However, having paid for my new clothes, I took my bundle and sallied out, determined, in the first place, to discover where I was. I felt ashamed to ask any one—it would look so extremely ridiculous; so I determined to look about me, and endeavour to discover. In the first place, I heard the English tongue

spoken on all sides. There was no mistaking, too, the English look of most of the faces. Besides, I saw at half a glance at the shops, the public-house signs, and every thing around, that this was an English community, though, for the life of me, I could not decide where it was. I felt quite certain it was not England,—the houses and buildings had too new an appearance. Then I fancied it must be a town in Canada; but could call to mind no seaport city which at all answered the description of this. That it was not an American town the flags flying from the roofs of some of the hotels and inns sufficiently proved.

I walked on down a wide, handsome street, with well-built houses and rich shops on each side of the way, and presently came to the neighbourhood of the docks and warehouses. Jolly sailors rolled about the streets, and stood at the door of the taverns; and I shortly came to the open gates of the docks or quays. I passed through these; and walking on, I saw numerous vessels loading and unloading. Some were large ships, while others were little brigs and schooners. The first of these attracted my attention: in her fore-rigging was a board, with these words painted thereon:

“ Brig *Ontario*,
130 tons register,
CAPTAIN EDWARDS,
For Melbourne direct.”

Melbourne! that was in Australia. I asked a sailor who was standing by, how many days' sail it was to Melbourne. He replied, three or four days. Then the place I was at now only three or four days' sail from Melbourne. I thought for a minute or two, and then the conviction burst upon me that I was in the city of Sydney, the capital of New South Wales, Australia.

I required no second thoughts on the subject, but felt perfectly convinced that I was right in my conjecture. The look of the streets, the white stone of which the

houses were built, made me feel quite certain that I was in Sydney,—the "Queen of the South," as the inhabitants fondly call their beautiful city.

Two years and six weeks ago I had ascended in my balloon on the banks of the Sacramento, California; and now, after spending more than two years of that time in an unknown and wonderful land, I had landed in New South Wales! Certainly, as far as balloon travelling was concerned, my early dreams had been realised, and I was an aeronaut with a vengeance. As I walked slowly back into the town, I set my wits to work to make out where this extraordinary country I had left could be. During my residence there I had several times thought that it might be situated in the unexplored wilds of Central Australia; and now I began to feel convinced that my first guess was indeed the truth. I knew that of the vast Australian continent, only the outskirts were inhabited—even known; that in maps and charts the whole interior was one vast blank; and I remembered with what feelings of wonder and awe I used to gaze at the word in the atlas—*unexplored*, written all across this continent.

I had heard that there were traditions among the aboriginal natives of fertile lands, vast lakes, and powerful nations in the unknown interior; but they were traditions only, and the central parts of Australia were generally considered by geographers to be vast, desolate, arid plains, where the tropical sun scorched up all vegetation, and where no drop of water was ever seen. I now considered it possible, even probable, that there might exist a vast circular chain of mountains of volcanic origin, or possibly burning volcanoes. I further thought there might exist beyond this enormous mountain-range a table-land, or great valley,—in fact, a country larger than England, Scotland, and Ireland,—as completely shut out from the rest of the world, to all intents and purposes, as though it were in another planet. That this country should never

before have been discovered I could easily imagine. In the first place, the interior of Australia itself has never been penetrated, much less explored. Then the circle of great volcanic mountains I believed to be of such vast height and so steep, as to be more inaccessible than the highest ranges of the Alps or Andes. The more I thought on this subject, the more confident I became that I was right, and that by accident I had been wafted by the winds where no one had ever penetrated before, and where possibly no one would ever penetrate again. However, as the sequel will prove, I was quite wrong in this conjecture, and the mystery was destined to be settled in an unexpected manner.

But now my thoughts were directed by the wants of nature. I felt faint and hungry, and remembered the necessity of food and drink. Accordingly I entered an hotel in George Street, and asked for dinner. I was shown into the coffee-room, at the end of which was a large mirror. Now, these were articles unknown and unwanted by the inhabitants of the country I had left, and for more than two years I had not seen the reflection of my own face. When, on approaching the mirror, I saw myself, I started back in the utmost surprise; indeed, I looked over my shoulder, almost thinking that the person I saw in the glass could not be myself. I saw a tall, *very fair*, and decidedly handsome young man, with blue eyes, abundant curly hair, and an incipient moustache. Now, to own the truth, as a boy I had never been at all good-looking, and was, besides, decidedly dark. I was bewildered. I put my hand up to my face, and the figure in the glass did likewise; consequently, I could no longer doubt it was my reflection. I was thunderstruck at this wonderful change in my appearance, which I could not account for, except by reason of the different atmosphere of the land whence I had come. Looking more closely in the glass, I saw that my skin was as white and fair as that of a girl. Now, I re-

membered the extraordinary fairness and beauty of the people I had left, and was inclined to think that my two years' residence had assimilated me to themselves.

However, speculation was useless; so I proceeded to enjoy my dinner, and ordered a half-pint of sherry, which in my weak state I thought would be very beneficial. I then asked if I could be accommodated with lodging for the night; and having paid the bill, again strolled out to buy me a few necessaries and articles of attire. My thoughts were all in a confused whirl, and it was with difficulty I could persuade myself all this was not a wild dream. But the chink of the gold in my pocket, and the sheen of the jewel on my finger, the gift of Glorious Golden Hair, were sufficient to convince me that I was neither mad nor dreaming. I soon felt tired, and returning to the hotel, went to bed early, and soon fell into a refreshing sleep. When I rose in the morning I felt fresh and invigorated, and was besides in excellent spirits. On the previous day my mind was in such a state of confusion, that I could not attempt to decide on my future course; but as I sat over my breakfast, I made up my mind to return to San Francisco, and endeavour to discover my friends.

I sallied out, and paid my first visit to the jeweller with whom I had left the jewelled ornament. He offered me three hundred and fifty pounds for the diamond, and told me that the other stones were worth at least a thousand pounds, but that he himself was not rich enough to purchase. I accepted his offer, and he paid me three hundred pounds, I having already had fifty. With this money in my pocket I proceeded down to the quays, resolved to take a passage in the first vessel bound for San Francisco. This I found to be the schooner *Cygnet*. I went on board, and was referred by the captain to the agent's office in George Street. There I concluded a bargain for a cabin passage to San Francisco for twenty-four pounds.

As the schooner was to sail that evening, I had but little time to look about me or provide outfit, but made the best of that time, and as the sun went down I was on the poop of the *Cygnets*, dashing merrily between Sydney Heads, bound for San Francisco.

Our passage across the bosom of the great Pacific Ocean was a favourable one, and in five weeks from the day we sailed from Sydney we sighted the coast of North America. I was standing on the quarter-deck with the chief mate, when the look-out in the fore-castle proclaimed “ Land, ho ! ” The schooner’s course was altered more to the north, so as not to run in too close. Nevertheless, in a couple of hours’ time we were so much nearer the land as to be able to make out its principal features. We saw to the north-east—that is to say, on our starboard bow—a long line of high land, distant, as we judged, about forty miles. Our course, which had previously been north-east, was now altered due north, and thus we stood in all the afternoon. Towards the end of the first “ dog-watch,” looking out on our weather-bow, I fancied I could perceive land there also. I called the attention of the mate, whose watch it was, to the fact. He went aloft with a glass, and coming down, reported a low island bearing N.W., distant about eleven miles. He descended to the cabin, and referring to the chart, the captain declared that it was the island of Gaudaloupe, and that we were steering between that and the mainland, which was on our other bow.

As there was a strong current setting towards the mainland, and the wind was blowing freshly from the south-west, our course was hauled up still more to the westward ; so that we now each moment increased our distance from the continent, and approached nearer to the island. At half-past six o’clock I descended into the cabin to tea, and remained there for about an hour. On my return to the deck, the island was only about half a mile right on our port beam. From the northern part of it, and stretching away to

the westward, I saw a cluster of rocks, or reef. It was blowing a stiff gale at the time, and the sea broke furiously over this reef, the spray dashing high in the air, and presenting a grand sight. As I gazed with awe, and listened to the dull roar of the breakers, an impression took possession of me that I had seen this island, the reef of rocks, and the distant mainland before. The more I looked, the more certain I felt of the fact, though it was long before I could decide when or how. Suddenly, however, a light burst in on my mind. The furthestmost, or westward, spur of the reef was where I had witnessed, from my balloon, the disastrous wreck of the *Sovereign of the Seas*. Strange are the ways of Providence! After many adventures and privations, and two years' sojourn in an unknown and wonderful land, I was again in view of the spot where the noble ship, with all her crew, was lost! Meanwhile, as we sailed quickly by, I accurately examined the reef, and felt confident I could point out the spot where the ship struck and went down within a few yards.

As I looked, a grand idea dawned upon me. I alone, of all the world, knew of the fate of the gold ship; I alone saw her dashed to pieces on the rocks, with all her rich freight! The idea was audacious; but once it entered my mind, it fixed itself there. I would fit out a vessel from San Francisco, and, by means of diving apparatus, would endeavour to recover the gold!

I knew she had to the value of 300,000*l.* sterling on board at least. This vast treasure might be mine! At once I resolved to make the attempt; and already foreseeing success, I commenced building gorgeous castles in the air. The sole possessor of such vast wealth, I might enrich all my friends, and be, in dear old England, a landed proprietor, with horses and hounds, and all the luxuries which wealth can bestow!

Then another thought took possession of me. The

memory of my lost love, Glorious Golden Hair, had never forsaken me. I remembered the look she gave me when the king said, that if ever I succeeded in revisiting his country, I should receive his pardon, and have my first request granted.

Yes; I would, when I had obtained possession of the treasure, organise a *balloon fleet*; and getting some daring spirits to accompany me, would again ascend, at the *same time of the year*, with the *same wind blowing*, and from the *same place*. Then I argued that, in all probability, I should be borne in the same direction again, pass through the regions of eternal night, and, finally, emerge into the happy land whence I had been expelled. Then my first request, which the king had promised to grant me, should be for the hand of his daughter.

It was a glorious dream! My heart beat fast, and a flush of pride came to my cheek as I pictured to myself my arrival for the second time in the wonderful land. But this time I thought I would make my appearance in very different style. My balloon fleet should bear with me all the wonders of science I could collect—books and philosophical instruments, some live *animals* which were there unknown, and a record of all the great discoveries made within the past two hundred years. Who knows, I thought, that I may not be the means of opening up a communication between this wonderful land and the rest of the world? At all events, I could instruct the simple inhabitants in the wonders of science, the beauties of art, of all which they were in total ignorance.

It was a glorious dream! and leaning over the bulwarks, I stood for hours, my eyes intently fixed on the place where I conjectured the sunken treasure lay. The sun went down; the moon and stars shone out; the reef, the dashing breakers, the island—all faded away in the distance; but I still kept my lonely watch, and dreamed of my future glorious triumph.

* * * * *

We arrived safely at San Francisco, and my first step was to revisit the diggings, where I had left my parents two years previously.

CHAPTER XI.

RAMOON, THE CEYLON DIVER, FRIGHTENS THE SHARKS, AND IS HIMSELF FRIGHTENED BY THE "GREAT-JAWED, SNAPPING DEVIL"—THE "MAN-JUMPER."

ARRIVED at San Francisco, I lost not a moment in starting for the diggings on the banks of the Sacramento river, where, two years and two months ago, I had left my friends. With some difficulty, I found the old creek where I had so long toiled for gold. The hut which my father had built was situated some hundred yards or so from the bank, and it was with beating heart I walked from the township along the narrow path by the side of the gully. In two years wonderful alterations had taken place. Where formerly were only a few tents, now stood numerous bark and log huts; and it was not without trouble I found the one which I myself had helped to build. At last, however, it stood before me; but how changed was every thing! There was now a large signboard over the door where I had so often seen my mother and sister sit in the evening, waiting for our return from work, announcing that rum, brandy, whisky, and tobacco were sold by the proprietor. A crowd of noisy ruffians stood about outside and at the bar, drinking, shouting, and swearing. Old memories came back to me, and at one moment I fancied I could hear my sister's gentle voice, and could almost conjure up her girlish figure flitting about among the sturdy ruffians who stood around. I remained for some minutes staring vacantly around, and seeking in vain for old familiar faces and objects. I began to think that I must be mistaken or dreaming,—every thing was so

altered and strange, while I felt as though I had been away but a day or so.

My eyes fell on the large slab of pine which served for the door-post, and there I saw my own name, which, three years ago, I had roughly carved with a knife. My sensations at that moment I cannot describe—a feeling of utter loneliness was, I think, predominant ; as though I were, indeed, alone in the world. After a time I set about making inquiries as to my friends. Some laughed at me, others stared, while none could or would give me any information ; so I wandered away from the hut, sad, weary, and broken-spirited. At last I found a storekeeper still on the creek who had been there three years ago, and from whom we had occasionally purchased provisions. From him I learned the dreadful news that I was a wanderer on the face of the earth, without a home, kith, or kin. Calamities and disaster followed my departure two years back : my sister and mother were taken ill with the ague—brought on, so the surgeon said, by anguish of mind and grief at the loss of her favourite son. While these dear ones were stretched on a bed of sickness, an accident befell my father and brother. A large mass of earth fell on them while at work in the claim, and both were so injured that in a few days death put an end to their sufferings, leaving my mother and sister in the last stage of exhaustion. With care and attention they might have recovered ; but no friendly hand was near to soothe their pain and whisper words of hope and comfort.

And so they died, mother and daughter—friendless—alone—uncared for—forsaken ! And now I am alone in the wide world !

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A feeling of utter desolation took possession of me ; and when I arrived in San Francisco, after my miserable journey to the diggings, I plunged into a career of dissipation, thinking to stifle my remorse and misery.

After a time, the acuteness of my natural grief wore off, and in place thereof there came a feeling of distaste and aversion to the world and every body in it. It almost seemed to me that my sojourn in a distant and unknown land had changed my nature. Be that as it may, the idea which had before possessed me now returned with renewed force, and I determined to leave the civilised world and endeavour once more to make my way to the land I had left, even though I perished in the attempt. This determination of mine was made all the stronger by a craving for adventure and excitement, and I resolved at once to put in practice my scheme for recovering the sunken treasure from the wreck of the *Sovereign of the Seas*, which lay at the bottom of the Pacific. My money began to run short, so I sold all the remaining jewels except the one given me by Glorious Golden Hair. I then found myself in possession of about 1200*l.* sterling, and with this sum I purchased and fitted out a small brig, about 170 tons burden. After paying for provisions for six months and various needful repairs, I found myself with 180*l.* It now became imperative I should succeed in my object, for that sum would not last me long, and to carry out my scheme of revisiting the land I had left I should require, perhaps, thousands. I secured a crew of ten men, a carpenter, and mate. The men were to receive wages at the rate of twenty dollars a month, and the carpenter forty. As for the mate, I found I could trust him, so I confided my scheme to him, and promised him a fifth share of the treasure if we succeeded. I also picked up with a native of the island of Ceylon, who had been engaged in the pearl fishery, and was an accomplished diver. I thought myself very fortunate in securing his services, as I myself knew absolutely nothing of the subject.

All being in readiness, we sailed from San Francisco with a fair wind and pleasant weather. I gave out that we were bound on a trading voyage to the

South Sea Islands, and the ship's papers were so drawn out. In six days we arrived off the island of Guadaloupe, and I had no difficulty in finding the reef of rocks running out from the land about half a mile, on which the *Sovereign of the Seas* struck and went down. The weather was calm ; so I brought the brig quite close and hove her to, having the anchor ready to let go in case she should be in danger of drifting on the rocks. Then I got out the boat, and with two sailors at the oars, Ramoon (that was the name of the Ceylon diver) and myself started to explore, and, if possible, discover some signs of the wreck.

In this, nowever, we were not successful ; as, even after the most careful search, we could not find, along the shore or on the reef, any pieces of wreck or other indication of the calamity. We then resorted to the lead, sounding carefully every few yards. I directed the men to row slowly about, while I, standing in the bows of the boat, made frequent casts. The water on the edge of the reef deepened all at once from one fathom to twenty. I had almost begun to despair of finding any trace of the sunken vessel by this means, and was thinking what to do next, when, after a cast of the lead, I noticed that the depth suddenly shoaled from twenty fathoms to thirteen. I ordered the men to cease rowing, and sounded again with the same result. Then I commenced carefully dropping the lead all around in a circle of some twenty yards ; and shortly the water suddenly deepened again to twenty fathoms. Half an hour's careful sounding convinced me that I had hit upon the wreck, and that it was the lead resting on the hulk of the ship which caused the shoaling of the water. I had provided an anchor and buoy, which I at once let down to mark the place, and then rowed back to the brig, determined to commence operations early the following morning.

It now became necessary for me to take my crew into my confidence, for my strange proceedings had

set them talking and wondering, and I believe they thought me mad. The proposal I made to them was as follows :

I told them I had strong reason for believing there was a sunken treasure near the spot which I was about to endeavour to gain. If I failed, they should be paid their wages as agreed upon, while if I succeeded, I promised each man 5000 dollars—about 1000*l.* English money. They knew nothing about the value of the supposed treasure, and joyfully accepted my offer, which appeared to them munificent. I then drew up an agreement which I required them to sign—my chief mate I had already made arrangements with, and there only remained the carpenter, the cook, and Ramoon the diver. To the carpenter I promised ten thousand dollars ; to the cook, the same as the crew ; while Ramoon was to have fifteen thousand dollars, if I succeeded by his aid in raising the boxes of gold. Thus I had promised fifty thousand dollars to the ten men composing my crew—and forty thousand dollars between the carpenter, cook, and Ramoon—ninety thousand dollars in all, or about 18,000*l.* English money. Large as this sum was, I knew that I could well afford to give it were I successful, as there would still remain over 200,000*l.*-worth of gold. My chief mate, who alone knew the value of the sunken treasure, would then take for his share over 40,000*l.*, while the remainder would be mine.

I was not naturally avaricious, but the thought of such vast wealth made my heart beat and my blood boil, and I was all impatience to commence operations. I don't think I slept at all that night, and shortly after sunrise I was in the boat with Ramoon and two sailors, leaving my chief mate in charge of the brig. I had provided ropes, chains, grapnels, and every other thing needful, hoping that Ramoon the diver would at once be able to enter the hold of the wrecked ship, and attach a rope he took down with him to one of the boxes of gold-dust.

All being in readiness, Ramoon tied a piece of thin rope round his waist, the coil being in the boat, and taking the deep-sea lead in his hands, stood for a moment on the gunwale, and then plunged head foremost into the sea. In an instant he was lost to our sight; but we knew he was rapidly descending, from the running out of the rope from the coil. After about a quarter of a minute this stopped, and we knew he was at the bottom. I took out my watch and noted the time as it flew on—half a minute—a minute—a minute and a half past, and all was still; the line hanging slack over the side of the boat. Suddenly a rapid pull came to it, and about three fathoms ran out; then again it was still. The next moment Ramoon shot to the surface, about twenty yards off, and struck out swiftly for the boat.

He quickly scrambled in, and when he had somewhat regained his breath, said the words,

“Sharks—ground sharks—plenty sharks.”

He then furnished himself with a large sheath-knife, which he placed between his teeth, and prepared to descend again. While they were pulling up the deep-sea lead, and as he stood on the stern-sheets of the boat, his copper skin glistening in the morning sun, I asked him if he had discovered the wreck.

“Yah! yah!—me see him—no can get there—too much big shark. Try again; rip de debbils up if they come anigh Ramoon.”

His white teeth glistened a moment, then he replaced the knife between his teeth, seized the deep-sea lead, and the next moment there was a splash, a dull plunge, and he was gone.

We waited in breathless anxiety for his reappearance. One minute—two—three passed, but still he did not come; the line was frequently agitated by jerks, when a fathom or so would run out. We knew by this that he was moving about at the bottom. Suddenly the line ran swiftly out, till ten or twelve fathoms had gone, and then was again still. Four

minutes had now passed: I had heard much of the wonderful time which these Ceylon divers could remain beneath the surface, but I did not think it possible they could hold their breath for more than two minutes or so, while Ramoon had actually been under water nearly five.

All at once an exclamation from one of the sailors attracted my attention. He pointed to a place in the water about ten yards off. There was a bubbling and commotion; and with horror I noticed that the clear water was dyed red. *It was stained with blood!*

"Great heavens! Ramoon had been attacked by the fierce ground-sharks, and, perhaps, at that moment they were tearing him to pieces!"

We looked in each other's faces with blank horror, and then again at the water, in which the red tints deepened, and spread over a wide surface. Soon, all around the boat the water was blood-red.

"Poor devil!" said one of the sailors, "the sharks has chawed him up, I reckon."

"God have mercy on him!"

Scarcely were the words out of my mouth, than a dark object rose to the surface, then another. A glance told me they were sharks; and I noticed that they were belly upwards, and blood was pouring from a deep gash in each. The next instant, and Ramoon, whom we all thought torn to pieces, suddenly appeared quite close to the boat, and hastily scrambled in. He threw himself at the bottom, utterly exhausted, and lay thus for a minute or so, breathing hard and laboriously; then he seemed to recover, and, after a draught of brandy, was able to speak.

"Plenty much big white-bellied sharks," he said; "me knife two ob de debbils, and de oders run way, —day 'fraid ob Ramoon.' Yah, yah!"

And he chuckled and grinned, as if immensely pleased at the fun.

"Are you not afraid?" I asked.

"Me 'fraid! What for 'fraid?" he replied scorn-

fully. "Ramoon not 'fraid ob twenty hundred million. Ramoon kill ten hundred tousand shark—one day—in his own country—'fore he eat him breakfast."

Now Ramoon was a brave fellow, and a skilful diver; but I had long come to the conclusion that my copper-coloured friend was, without exception, the greatest liar that ever trod this globe. So I paid but little attention to the boast of the ten hundred thousand before breakfast, and proceeded to question him as to what he had seen.

He said that he had found the wreck, which lay heeled over, half-buried in the sand; but that he had been unable to enter the hold, as all the ports were closed or bloeked up, and there was a lot of rubbish and wreck over the hatchway. He said in his next descent he would attaech ropes to this, and then we above could haul away.

Accordingly, having sufficiently rested, the diver again took the lead; and, with the rope fast around his middle, plunged into the sea. This time he was not gone so long—not more than a minute and a half at the most. When he had serambled into the boat, I noticed that he looked seared, and was not so voluble as on the other oecasions.

"Any more sharks, Ramoon?" I asked.

"Shark all gone," he said, so soon as he had recovered his breath. "More worse than shark. Ramoon 'fraid!"

"Afraid! what, of the sharks?"

"Me no 'fraid sharks,—Ramoon fight sharks! No fight big-jaw snapping debbil."

Then Ramoon went on to explain that in his last deseent he had encountered a terrible monster, the like of which he had never before seen or heard of. I listened with wonder and incredulity to his extraordinary tale. He said that an enormous monster suddenly descended close to him, and snapped within a few feet of his body with its terrible jaws. It was, he said, in shape like an alligator, only it had legs

like a grasshopper, and moved, not by swimming or creeping, but by prodigious leaps. He said that the brute was about forty feet long, and his body twice as thick as an ox. He said, also, that the creature was very heavy, weighing some tons; and that after its first leap, it lay sluggishly for a moment or two, and then, turning his dreadful eyes towards him, and snapping its jaws together, it prepared for another bound in his direction. He, however, not liking the look of the beast, did not wait, but quickly ascended to the surface.

This was certainly a very extraordinary tale, and I was at first inclined to disbelieve it, knowing what a desperate liar my copper-coloured friend was. But I now discovered that his terror was genuine; and it was with great difficulty that I could induce him to descend again that day. However, he made two more descents; and, having fastened the ropes, we above hauled on them, and partially cleared the hatchway. It was now dinner-time, and Ramoon being quite exhausted, we resolved to do no more work that day, and accordingly returned to the ship. All the afternoon the diver amused himself by spinning the toughest of yarns to the sailors of the wonders and perils he had seen and encountered. I can safely assert that never before were such enormous lies told in so short a time. Baron Munchausen would have no earthly chance with Ramoon the diver. That was the opinion I formed after hearing a few of his tales.

The next day, shortly after dawn, operations were again commenced. Ramoon had fastened ropes and chains to the spars and rubbish on the hatchway, and we now towed the brig over the spot, and, attaching the ropes to the capstan, proceeded to heave away. After about an hour's work, the diver again descended, and reported that the hatchway was clear, and that he should be able to get into the hold on his next descent. Now, I began to think, our task is almost accomplished. He may have a little difficulty in getting at the boxes

of gold, but it is only a question of time. Down he went again, and was gone about two minutes, when he suddenly appeared at the surface, serambled into the boat, looking more frightened and horrified than I had ever before seen him. So soon as he could speak, he said solemnly:

"Ramoon no go down no more."

"Not dive again? Nonsense!" I said. "Why not? Are you afraid of the sharks and 'snapping devil,' as you call it?"

"Me no 'fraid of the sharks," he retorted angrily. "Me only little 'fraid of big snapping debbil. But me 'fraid of 'noder thing."

"What?"

Ramoon lowered his voice, and, looking stealthily round, as if afraid of being overheard, said:

"Dere's a man live down dere in de hold of ship!"

"A man? Nonsense!"

"Yes; a man—a jumping-man! He got no arms—only fins; and he got a great long spike on de top of his head. He put his head down, an' jump at me. He came quite close to me, an' I hear him grind him teeth, and see him roll him eyes. Me tink a bad spirit get in one of de dead bodies of de wreck, and dar spike grow out of him head. Dat 'man-jumper' am de real old debbil."

Was there ever heard such an extravagant tale?—a man at the bottom of the sea, without arms, and with a spike growing out of his head!

But Ramoon persistently adhered to it, and neither threats, promises, nor persuasions could induce him again to go down.

"Me no 'fraid of shark—on'y little 'fraid of big-jaw snapping debbil—but me plenty 'fraid of 'man-jumper.'"

It was desperately vexatious, but there was no help for it. "Man-jumper" or no "man-jumper," Ramoon would not go down again.

At last, when I saw there was no earthly chance of overcoming his fears, I resolved to go down myself. I could not dive like my copper friend, so I set the carpenter at work to make a diving-bell. Fortunately, we had plenty of materials on board, and the work rapidly proceeded. However, it would take a fortnight to complete; and, as I had neither the requisite tubing, nor a force-pump to force the air down, we sailed for San Francisco, leaving the buoy above the wreck, that we might have no trouble in finding it again. I expended about twenty pounds in San Francisco, in purchasing air-pumps, India-rubber tubing, and other apparatus for the diving-bell, and then at once made sail for the scene of our labours. I was determined to succeed, and felt a blind confidence that ultimately I should, in spite of all obstacles.

And now for that momentous adventure—my first descent in the diving-bell into the depths of the ocean. I had been Up in the Air, and now I was about to go Down in the Sea. I seated myself on the shelf which ran round the inside of the diving-bell, and then gave directions for it to be hoisted from the fore-yardarm of the brig. I had given full instructions to my chief mate how to proceed. I had arranged a code of signals, so that by pulling a cord within I could signify what I wanted to those above. The air-pump was to be constantly kept working; and when I gave the word, the diving-bell was to be slowly and steadily lowered.

“Lower away!”

The blocks creaked, and as rope was paid out I began slowly to descend. Soon the edge of the bell reached the water, and in half a minute I was completely below the surface, and, looking through the glass window, could see the water washing and dashing against my prison. As the bell descended I began to suffer from the pressure of the atmosphere, and felt a singular tingling in my ears. At first it was light enough; but, as I went lower, the light faded away,

and all was gloomy and dark. By degrees, my eyesight got accustomed to this; and, leaning down from my shelf, I thought I could see the bottom. I now signalled to stop lowering. Looking through the windows, of which there were four, I could distinguish through one of them a dark mass in the sea. This I concluded must be the wreck; and I telegraphed for the diving-bell to be moved in an easterly direction, for so the wreck lay by my pocket compass. When I was nearly over the dark mass, I gave the signal to lower away. This they did, and so fast that the pressure of the air was quite painful.

Down—down—down, until I could see the rocks and seaweed at the bottom, and also many large fish swimming about.

Suddenly I felt a shock; the bell tilted over on one side, water rushed in, and I was violently thrown out into the sea. I kept my eyes open, however, and saw at a little distance the towering, gloomy sides of the wrecked ship. The next instant I heard a sort of rushing sound, and saw a great body moving towards me from above. I saw it coming, surely and swift—a great monster, neither fish nor beast. Its enormous jaws were open, and at the moment when it descended within a yard of me, they closed with a prodigious snap, and the brute lay still, only rolling its dreadful eyes, and working its grasshopper legs. All this took place in an instant, and the next I was striking out frantically and rising to the surface. I saw the great brute gather itself up, and spring far above me. It could not swim, but only leap and crawl, and, luckily, it again missed its aim, though as it came past me its jaws snapped fiercely, and the great teeth ground together. It lashed its long tail, too, so furiously as to create quite a commotion in the water. Before the brute could again spring at me, I was at the surface, close to the brig. A rope was thrown to me, and I was hauled on board, wet, bruised, and frightened. Shortly afterwards, some fragments of wood floated

to the surface, then more, till at last the sea was covered with them, some a considerable size, others ground to match-wood.

"Dat's de big-jawed snapping debbil," said Ramoon, solemnly; "he berry angry, and chaw up de bell."

This was doubtless the fact: the great brute, missing me, had ground up the diving-bell, in its fury, between its dreadful jaws. As I looked on the small splinters to which the strong and heavy diving-bell had been reduced, I shuddered; and thought how it would have fared with my poor bones, if the beast had caught me.

The result of this adventure almost convinced me that, for my purpose, a diving-bell was useless; and I commenced to cast about for some other means.

Next I thought about making a diver's dress and helmet, so that, heavily weighted, I might walk about at the bottom of the sea. Ramoon declared that the snapping devil would certainly seize and destroy me; and even if I escaped its terrible jaws, and penetrated into the hold of the vessel, I should be attacked by the ghastly "man-jumper," and impaled **on** his spike.

No matter: I was determined nothing should turn me from my purpose; and will proceed to relate my further adventures in search of the sunken treasure.

I must confess that this last adventure produced a great effect upon me, and, had I been less determined, it might, perhaps, have turned me from my purpose. For more than half an hour broken splinters kept rising to the surface, from which I concluded that my amiable friend, the "big-jawed snapping devil," as Ramoon had named him, was still venting his rage on the remnants of my poor diving-bell.

Ramoon, the rascal, instead of evincing any sorrow, positively chuckled over this unfortunate first attempt.

"Ha, ha! you laff at Ramoon, 'cause he no go down no more. You go down 'gen, eh?"

"Certainly I shall go down again. I am no more afraid of the great sea-crocodile than you are of the sharks."

"Great sea-crocodile! ha, ya, ya! You call him snappin' debbil de sea-crocodile! You plenty brave fellow. You jest wait little time—jest wait a little till he see *him*."

"Who's him?" I asked.

"De man-jumper—the feller dat lib down dere wid de spike out of him head."

"I don't believe a word of your absurd tale," said, rather angrily; "any how, man-jumper or no man-jumper, down I go again."

Ramoon looked at me with an expression half-pitying, half-admiring, on his copper face, and then went off to regale the sailors forward with a few more of his lies.

It now became a serious question with me what I should do. To give up, when the prize was almost in my grasp, I resolved I never would. What though I had seen the "big-jawed snapping devil," and narrowly escaped destruction! Had I not also seen the wreck of the ship in the hold of which the gold-chests lay? Then there arose before me the vision of Glorious Golden Hair, as I had last seen her on the failure of my attempt to carry her off, and my expulsion from the Land of Light.

Another balloon, an enormous balloon—if necessary, a dozen balloons—I would have constructed, and, borne on the air, would again endeavour to reach the glorious plains and valleys of that wonderful country.

So, unshaken in my resolution, I kissed the jewel she had given me; and I swore by her dear memory to recover the treasure, and then devote it to attaining this sole object of my life. I called a council, which consisted of my chief mate, the carpenter, myself, and Ramoon. This latter I soon dismissed; for he did nothing but laugh and jeer at me about the perils

in store for me from the spike of the man-jumper, never I should be rash enough to descend. To tell the truth, the fellow's constant harping on that topic, though it did not cause me to falter in my resolution, yet caused me much annoyance and some little perturbation. His words with regard to the "big-jawed snapping devil," as he called it, I had myself verified. What if the ghastly tale of the man without arms and with a spike growing out of his head should also be true! In spite of myself, I shuddered and turned pale at the thought. It was so very horrible.

With a great effort I dismissed the idea, and, firm in my resolution, proceeded to consider the best means of carrying out my project. After some discussion, we all agreed that a diving-bell was next to useless; and finally I resolved to make my next attempt by means of a water-tight diver's dress and helmet, clothed in which I could descend and walk about the bottom of the sea at my leisure. But, in order to construct this, it was necessary once more to return to San Francisco, as it was quite beyond the carpenter's powers. The delay necessitated by this was vexatious, but unavoidable; so once more we set sail for the capital of California, where we duly arrived in seven days.

I at once procured the materials, and set to work to construct my diver's suit. The dress I had made of stout duck canvas, which I had well tarred again and again, until it was quite water-tight. The trousers were joined at the knee to a pair of stout sea-boots, which, also, I rendered thoroughly water-tight. The canvas over the hands and arms I chose of a tighter kind, so as to insure freedom of movement. Next came the helmet. This was the most important consideration of all; for it was absolutely necessary that it should be at once not too heavy, yet strong, water-tight, and with glass windows for the eyes.

After many failures, I at last made one to my satisfaction. The framework was of iron hoop and

wire, of sufficient strength to prevent the pressure of the water crushing it in. Then I let into the front part two large squares of plate-glass, and carefully covered the whole with canvas, with the exception of two round holes, by which, when placed on my head, I could see through the glass. I was most careful that the whole should be thoroughly water-tight; for I well knew that not only the success of my attempt, but probably my life, depended on it. This fact I ascertained by sinking the whole affair when finished, and afterwards examining the interior, when to my joy, I found that not a drop of water had penetrated to the inside. And now came a momentous question—How was I to get inside and close myself up, so that water could not penetrate? This difficulty I also surmounted, though not without much trouble and many failures. The way I did it was as follows; The headpiece was made separate from the canvas dress for the body, so I was to put this latter on first, and then don my diving-helmet; then I had the rim of the canvas attached to the lower part of the helmet, and hot pitch, laid on with a brush, was to make the joint perfectly water-tight. This was, perhaps, a clumsy method of overcoming the difficulty, but, at any rate, it appeared likely to answer the purpose. Of course, I had not forgotten that I should require a supply of fresh air; and to this end I had two holes made in the helmet, in which I inserted two stout gutta-percha tubes, each twenty fathoms in length. One of these I fitted with a valve of leather, which opened inwards to the helmet only, the other outwards; so that air might be forced in through one by means of the force-pump, while the valve of the other I so arranged as to enable me, when I chose, to open it, and expel the air rendered impure by my breathing. The second valve was in front, opposite where my mouth would be, and a string went from it to my girdle, where I could reach it with my left hand, and thus be able to open it at pleasure. As for the first

valve, that would be worked by the pressure of the air sent down from the force-pump, which of course would be kept in constant action so long as I was below the surface.

When my apparatus was complete, I put on the dress, then the helmet; and when this was done, the carpenter proceeded, with a brush dipped in boiling tar, to *seal me up*, as it were. Then the force-pump was set to work, and, to my great joy, worked admirably, the valves both opening and shutting with ease.

It was with feelings of intense pride, even triumph, that I walked up and down the deck encased in my canvas dress and iron-bound helmet. I must have looked a strange figure—the tarred canvas dress, the great sea-boots, and, above all, the great black helmet, with the goggle eyes of glass, and two long pipes proceeding therefrom. Ramoon could not contain his mirth, but rolled on the deck in paroxysms of laughter.

“Dat’s him, dat’s him! Ba Jumbo, you get a spike on you head, and den you and de ‘man-jumper’ have a much great bobbery. I tink de ‘man-jumper’ be frighten ob you. Dem is de real ole debbil eyes. If he run ’way, all right; but if he be no frighten, look out! Ba Jumbo, how dat feller will spike you! Yah, yah, yah, yah, ho-o-o!”

And he wound up with a perfect howl of laughter at the idea of the “man-jumper” spiking me.

I could have kicked him, I was so angry; but I remembered that he could not help his nature, and that he had served me bravely and honestly till, alarmed by his own fancy or something he had really seen, he refused to go down again. So I forgave him his ill-timed mirth in consideration of his past services, and, nothing daunted by the thought of being spiked, went straight ahead for the goal I had in view.

There was one other little detail which I thought of at the last moment. It was very dark down at the bottom of the sea, but few rays of light being able to

penetrate and illuminate the eternal gloom ; so I resolved on carrying a small oil lamp in my girdle. Of course, a supply of air would be needed for this ; and for that purpose, I attached a smaller gutta-percha tube to the large one connected with the force-pump, and this again to the lamp, so that the same pump might supply me with air for breathing and the lamp with air for burning.

Now all was in readiness, and once again we made sail for the scene of my past labours, and, as I fondly hoped, of my future triumph.

My first attempt was a failure. I lowered myself down from the boat in which was the force-pump, the tubing, and all the other apparatus, having given strict directions that on no account whatever should the pumping be allowed to cease. I had weights slung around my neck, sufficient, as I calculated, to sink me ; and so they did, too, with a vengeance, for I plunged down with my feet uppermost ; and as I found it impossible to gain an erect position, I as quickly as possible threw off the weights, and, not waiting to be hauled up, rose to the surface. I was dragged into the boat, none the worse for this my first attempt.

I at once saw that, in order to be able to walk about at the bottom of the sea, it was necessary that I should have the weights, not around my neck, but on my feet, and at once set to work to remedy this stupid blunder of mine. I also remembered another thing. Brief as was the period I was under water, and although I had not reached the bottom, I yet got a glimpse through the windows of the helmet of some large fish sullenly swimming about. These proved to be sharks ; and although my friend Ramoon was not afraid of them, and asserted that he had killed "ten hundred thousand 'fore he eat him breakfast," I by no means shared his indifference or confidence, especially as I had been foolish enough to attempt my first descent unarmed.

By the aid of the carpenter I had attached to each post a "deep-sea lead," weighing together sixty pounds. I had them flattened out, so as to fit to the boots, coming half round each leg, which would render them less cumbersome and unwieldy. They were so arranged that I could throw them off in a moment if I wished suddenly to rise to the surface. I also carried *some* weights slung around my neck; but those on my boots were the principal ones. Then came the question of what arms I should carry to defend myself against the possible attacks of the monsters of the deep.

Ramoon volunteered his shark-knife—a neat little weapon, with a bone handle above five inches, and a broad, slightly curved blade two feet, in length. Colonel Bowie's amiable invention was but a toothpick to my friend Ramoon's shark-knife. I by no means felt confident as to my skill in using it; what was play to the Ceylon diver might be death to me. As to the "big-jawed snapping devil," I must own I was at a loss. I was determined to go on, in spite of a dozen such monsters; but as to how, if he again appeared, I should encounter him, I confess I had not the least idea. To defend myself, even with Ramoon's scythe-like knife, against such a brute was, I knew, hopeless; but what was to be done? As I have before said, *go on I would*; and I verily believe that my only idea respecting this great beast was a hope that I should not see him. If I did, and he attacked me, as in all probability he would, I should probably endeavour to escape, failing in which, I supposed I should perish.

All was now ready for my next descent. Just before I put on my diving-dress, Ramoon, who stood by with his shark-knife, waiting to hand it to me, suddenly seized the helmet, and commenced dancing round the deck with it.

"I say, gubnor," he said, in his abominable slang, half-Yankee, half-nigger, with a tinge of his own na-

tive Ceylon,—“I say, gubnor, ba Jumbo, we’ll fix ’em! Let’s hab a spike on de top. Pertend you no got arms, on’y fins, den dat ‘man-jumper’ ’ll tink you’s anoder ‘man-jumper,’ bigger an’ uglier; an’ if dat bucket an’ dem goggle dead-lights don’t frighten he, ba Jumbo, gubnor, he’ll spike yer! Hab a spike, and when he come, run right at de debbil—dem goggles ’ll do it!”

But I declined to have a spike on my helmet, or “bucket,” as he called it, and do not believe my faith in the terrors of the goggle eyes would have proved sufficient to induce me to attempt “spiking” any submarine monster. Then, how I was to pretend I had got no arms, Ramoon did not condescend to explain; so, thanking him for his extremely lucid and feasible scheme, I put on my helmet, was duly made water-tight by the pitch-brush, and getting into the boat, was rowed to the spot marked by the buoy, and again prepared to descend.

This time I went down all right, feet foremost, and so came to the bottom. I stood still for a short time, and looked out through the glass eyes or windows. All at first appeared a dusky haze; but in less than a minute my eyes got accustomed to the dim, subaqueous gloom, and I could distinguish objects. I soon made out the dark outline of the wreck, and the next thing which drew my attention were the great fish I had caught a glimpse of in my first descent. It required but a very short survey of these to convince me that they were the terrible and voracious ground-sharks. Soon they seemed to perceive me; and I also, as my eyes got more accustomed to the dull light, could distinguish them more plainly.

It was with difficulty I could keep my feet, even heavily weighted as they were; for the current ran strong, and there was a sort of eddy or whirlpool caused by its dashing against the wreck. The pumping in of the air, too, through the valve caused a dreadful din in the hollow of the helmet; then I felt

DOWN IN THE SEA.

strange tingling in the ears, pains over the eyes, and a feeling of great oppression from the pressure of the water without, and the compressed air within, my prison. I now made an effort, and walked boldly forward a few paces towards where I saw the great fish swimming about. I stumbled along, somehow,—awkwardly enough, I dare say,—and, to my great joy, noticed that they darted off in dismay as I approached. Probably they had never seen such a strange object before, and no doubt the lamp in my girdle, which cast a bright stream of light in front of me, contributed to their confusion. It was with unbounded joy I observed this, and replaced Ramoon's knife—which I held in my right hand, prepared to battle with the brutes—back in my girdle.

After a stay of about five minutes, my sensations were so strange and painful that I felt constrained to pull the signal string to be hauled up ; and in a short time was again safe in the boat—faint and weary, but by no means discouraged.

After two or three more descents, my disagreeable feelings were much mitigated, and I was enabled to remain down a longer time without much inconvenience. I found it very awkward to have to be hauled up and lowered down every time, and hit upon the device of having a rope-ladder let down from the boat, up which to ascend or descend at my pleasure. The bottom end of this was securely anchored to the ground by means of two hundredweights which I attached to it.

At first I did not venture far from my ladder ; but with practice I got bolder, and at last was not afraid to lose sight of it altogether, depending upon finding my way back by means of a piece of string which I held in my hand whenever I wandered away. The continual noise made by the force pump at work, giving air down, was a great annoyance to me for a long time ; but I soon got used to this, and it gave me no further trouble. My wanderings about at the bot-

tom of the sea were very unsteady and precarious ; and I had to use the utmost caution in approaching the wreck, for most furious eddies and currents swept around it, at times lifting me off my feet. Indeed, it was only at certain states of the tide, and in calm weather, that I dared go close to it at all, so fierce and furious were those submarine whirlpools.

My immediate object was to seek some means of entering the hold of the wreck ; and at last I decided that, although there were many rents and holes in her sides, these were so much blocked up with rubbish as to render entrance that way impracticable. Accordingly nothing remained for it but to ascend the side of the hull and descend through the hatchway. Having resolved on this, I at once set to work, and, taking down with me a bag of spikes and a large hammer, I drove them into the crumbling timbers at regular distances, so as to form a series of steps. This operation alone took me more than three days, as I was unable to stand more than a quarter of an hour beneath the surface at once, and could only approach the wreck in calm weather, and when there was but little current driving by.

After a time, my old enemies the sharks, grown bolder by familiarity, swarmed around me in great numbers. At first, if one more daring than the rest ventured too close, I could scare him away by turning my lantern full on him, when he would dart off in the utmost terror and trouble me no more. But in time the terror of this wore off, and these tigers of the sea grew dangerously audacious. Then I resorted to Ramoon's knife, and inflicted severe wounds on several, which had a salutary effect. Still, the brutes were so quick in their motions, and I, incumbered with the heavily weighted diver's dress, was of necessity so slow, that I never could succeed, as I wished, in plunging the knife up to the hilt in one of their bodies.

The danger and annoyance from these brutes now grew unbearable. Frequently a great fellow would

sail stealthily up behind, turn half over, and make a grab at me with his dreadful jaws. Then I would strike out furiously with my big knife, aiming at the shark's throat and under-jaw. I generally inflicted a pretty severe wound, though, I fear, seldom if ever a fatal one.

At last, on one occasion, an event happened which well-nigh put an end to my diving and my life together. I have already said that two pipes led from the helmet up to the boat; these were payed out from the coil in the boat, according as I went farther away from the ladder, and signified my need of more slack by pulling. I was just about to climb up on the wreck, when I received a sudden jerk which dragged me backwards. At the same moment the action of the force-pump ceased. "What on earth are they up to in the boat?" I thought, and instantly pulled the signal string violently for them to be cautious and keep on pumping.

No sooner had I done so than I received another violent jerk, which dragged me several yards.

The supply of air, too, had stopped, and I felt suffocating. My ears tingled dreadfully, my hand felt as if it would burst; frantically I tugged at the signal-string for a fresh supply of air, but none came. Heavens! this was horrible. Choking, gasping for breath, I felt my eyes start out from my head, and knew I was getting black in the face. My lamp, too, went out for want of a supply of air, and I was in a desperate way. I staggered along, endeavouring to reach the ladder. Then it was that I felt another tug at the tubing, and, looking above me, saw a dark object in the water between me and the ladder.

Then suddenly the truth flashed on me! One of the sharks had seized hold of the air-tube, and was dragging me about while endeavouring to bite through the tough gutta-percha: instantly I recovered my presence of mind now that I knew the nature of the danger—"To the surface!"

'Twas my only chance, so I pulled forth my knife, and with one sweeping cut divided both the tubes just above my head. At the same moment I relieved myself of the two weights on my legs, and struck out vigorously for the surface. The water rushed in through the cut tubes, but still not so fast as to fill the helmet all at once; and in the space of a quarter of a minute, to my great joy, my head shot above water. Half stifled and frightened, not being able to see, I waved my hand wildly above my head to attract attention, and then used all my efforts to keep myself afloat. I heard a dim sound of shouting, and just as I was about to succumb to fatigue and suffocation (for the water in the helmet washed over my mouth and nose), I felt myself seized and hauled on board. Then, as quickly as possible, the helmet was taken off, and I again breathed the pure fresh air of heaven.

This perilous adventure seriously discomposed me. I had been within an inch of suffocation; besides which, if I had been attacked by other sharks while I was deprived of air, I could not have defended myself effectually. How could I guard against this desperate danger for the future? I knew the cunning nature of these sea-beasts, and feared that one or more of them might resort to the same tactics. If I could have reached the fish, I should not have cared; for I had grown so quick and adroit in the use of my knife, that I did not doubt I should now give a good account of him. If I could only use a gun or rifle!—but under water—ha! like lightning across the sky, an idea flashed on my mind. I had on board an air-gun—a powerful air-gun of the best construction; and this, I knew, would act as well under water as above. I leaped to my feet, and ran down to the cabin where it was. Then I proceeded to compress the air by means of the apparatus, and load the gun. I practised with it for some time, firing bullets at a mark, and also shooting at any object I saw beneath the surface. It

was an excellent weapon, and I soon made very good practice with it.

Thus armed, then, I fixed fresh tubing, donned my diving suit, and again descended the ladder into the deep. The sharks, as was their wont, soon gathered round me; and I resolved to test the efficacy of my new weapon. I singled out one great white-bellied monster; and, taking aim at his head, pulled the trigger. He was about five yards distant, so I could narrowly watch the effect of my shot. He gave one furious plunge forward, passing close to me, and then commenced rolling and writhing, lashing the water furiously with his tail. He was in the agonies of death; and, in less than a minute, I had the satisfaction of seeing this monstrous fish turn belly upwards and rise to the surface—dead. This successful trial gave me fresh confidence. I now kept a bright lookout above me, and, whenever I saw any sharks approach my tubing, I favoured them with bullets from my air-gun; till, being hit, and not understanding it, they “made tracks,” as the Yankees say, for parts unknown. My air-gun was capable of discharging nearly twenty shots without my having again to compress the air; all I had to do after firing, was to ram home another bullet. But as each discharge after the first grew weaker, I did not fail to load afresh every time I ascended to the surface.

At last I clambered up the sides of the ship, and stood on the deck. I found the main hatchway, and, not without some misgiving, lowered myself between decks, and then again down into the lower hold. It was here almost perfectly dark, but little light penetrating down through the hatchway. By degrees, however, my eyes grew accustomed to the increased gloom, and could make out surrounding objects. Casks, cases, packages, and lumber of all descriptions, lay about; while, here and there, the eddying tide washed through the ribs of a human skeleton, inside which shrimps and shell-fish crawled and had their home.

Before starting from San Francisco, I had made myself acquainted with the usual place for storing gold, and was fully possessed of every particular, even as to the kind of boxes in which it was kept.

Now commenced the heaviest part of my labours. I brought down with me, time after time, many ropes, chains, and grapnels ; these I fixed to casks, cases, or rubbish, as it happened, and then ascended to the surface, and caused the ropes to be taken to the capstan of the brig and hove up. Thus, by degrees, we accumulated a large stock of casks and cases ; some filled with beef and pork ; others with rum, beer, and wine, and numerous articles which formed part of the ship's freight. But this was terribly slow work ; and, after a month of it, I had made so little progress that my heart grew sick and heavy within me. We had now been two months at work, and yet had not got one single box of gold. There was still a vast mass of cargo and rubbish to be moved before I could hope to reach the gold. After much thought, I determined to blow this up with gunpowder. It was fortunate for the success of my undertaking, that I had always been passionately fond of scientific pursuits. Many a time had I done in miniature in a pond or stream what I was now about to do on a grand scale in the depths of the Pacific Ocean.

I understood the construction and use of the galvanic battery, and knew how, by its means, charges of powder could be ignited under water.

I will tell you how it is done. To the ends of the two wires proceeding from the poles of the battery a piece of platinum wire is attached, so as to connect the two wires. When the battery is in action, the strong current of electricity speedily renders the platinum wire red hot. So, of course, if the end of the two wires and the connecting platinum wire be inserted in a cask of powder, and the battery then set to work, the powder will be almost instantly exploded. But in order that I might regulate this explosion, I ar-

ranged that the circuit should not be completed until I was ready. That is to say, only one of the wires was attached to the battery until such time as I wished the explosion. Accordingly I descended with a keg of powder, in which was inserted the two wires with the connecting platinum. The battery in the boat was all in readiness, and I had given my chief mate accurate directions how to complete the circuit *when I gave the signal*, by pulling the signal-string. Of course you will at once understand that, before doing so, I intended to retire to a safe distance, a hundred yards at least from the wreck. Indeed, I think it would have been wiser for me to have gone to the surface first ; but I had an invincible curiosity to witness the effect of the explosion of a barrel of powder under water, I myself being so also. Any body could see a ship blown up from the surface ; but to witness the smoke, explosion, and submarine fire—that was a glorious idea, and one that well accorded with my disposition. So I descended, having with great labour excavated a hole in the pile of rubbish and cargo. I placed therein the keg of powder, and carefully covered the hole up again. For some time I had not been annoyed by sharks ; they appeared not to like my air-gun, and had migrated elsewhere, at least for a time. This was a subject of congratulation for me, as it enabled me to work without fear.

As to the “big-jawed snapping devil” and the “man-jumper” which Ramoon described, I had not seen the former since my adventure with the diving-bell, and as to the latter, I now felt convinced that it was only a lie of the Ceylon diver’s. And now, all being ready, I made my first descent, to see that the wires were all clear for conducting the electric current to the gun powder. I was by this time enabled to remain down a long time, often more than half-an-hour, without the least inconvenience ; so, before retiring to a safe distance, I determined to examine all my arrangements minutely, that there might be no possibility of failure.

I descended, and made my way to the hold without accident. The wires were all right; and at a moment's notice, by simply pulling hard on the string I held in my hand, I could cause a tremendous blow up. Before leaving the hold, I went round, gathered up all the tools, the grappels, &c., and attached them to one of my chains, in order that they might be hauled up. My back was to the hatchway, when I fancied I perceived a dim phosphorescent light; I turned round, and a sight met my eyes which to my dying day I shall never forget.

There, at about ten yards' distance, close to where I had buried my powder-keg, stood a hideous, a terrible object! Ramoon had not lied; and I at once recognised the horrible "man-jumper."

To make matters even worse—my situation more agonising and desperate—I saw also, crawling down the hatchway, the dreadful "big-jawed snapping devil."

Slowly, methodically, he moved his great grasshopper legs, and protruded his awful carcass down.

Then I turned my eyes once more on the dreadful "man-jumper," and almost fainted with terror. His body appeared to me, as Ramoon described it to be, that of a human being. But the face—how can I ever describe its hideousness?—the rolling eyes, dreadful mouth, filled with a row of long, glistening teeth! The monster seemed to be gibbering and making faces at me, all the time swinging backwards and forwards, and working the fins in place of arms.

It was surrounded by a pale phosphorescent light, which seemed to emanate from its body, and by that light I could distinctly see the hideous human face, the hair like a lot of serpents and seaweeds, and the long spike growing from the top of his head!

How long I remained gazing in utter horror at this demon-like form I cannot say—it seemed to me ages of agony. Next I heard a sort of gurgling sound: the creature then, after swaying about violently several times, suddenly lowered his head, and, point-

ing the spike right at me, prepared to jump. Although its head was lowered, I could still see the prominent, gleaming eyes glowering fiercely at me.

I staggered back, half-fainting. Human nature could bear no more; and, in utter desperation, I resolved to pull the signal-string for the battery to be put in action, and the gunpowder fired.

Any thing better than the presence of this horrid creature. Better I should be blown into eternity at once!

I pulled the string with all my force.

A few moments of intense suspense, during which this terrible monster, glaring with its horrible eyes, seemed about to launch itself at me, and impale me on the spike so dreaded by Ramoon the diver. Then, when almost fainting with terror, there arose a terrible commotion in the sea. The sensation was such as I have never experienced before or since. It was as though the waters were reft asunder, and a vast cave, filled with fire, formed. I remember first feeling a violent shock, then an intense heat—dazzling light—and I know no more. Weak nature gave way, and I became unconscious. The last thing I remember was a dream-like vision of whirling, boiling waters, fragments of timber, and lurid flames, in which I was enveloped. So violent was the shock, that the helmet and diver's dress were torn from me, and when I recovered consciousness, I was lying wounded, bruised, and naked on the quarter-deck of the brig, the mate pouring brandy down my throat. So soon as I could speak, I asked for an explanation. I was told that, in obedience to my signal, the battery was instantly put in motion. There was no explosion on deck, but a vast pillar of water was heaved up, with many fragments of wreck and cargo. I was cast up with this watery mountain, and fell in the sea, fortunately near the brig. The boat was waiting alongside, and I was dragged aboard before death had succeeded to insensibility.

Torn, bruised, and bleeding, scorched by the fire, drenched and half-drowned by water, my feelings were so intensely painful, that on first coming to myself I hoped and prayed for death. But despite my pain and the numerous wounds and bruises I had received, I yet recovered; and on the second day was able to crawl from the cabin, and survey the scene of my last terrible adventure. Among other injuries I found that the sudden fiery explosion had injured my eyesight, and that, in addition to bruised limbs and two broken ribs, my vision was dim and uncertain.

I take credit to myself that even in these untoward circumstances my resolution did not falter one jot. So soon as the first sensation of intense pain wore off, true as the needle to the pole, my thoughts returned to the enterprise.

Besides the personal injuries I had sustained, there was another reason why I could not again descend, at least for some time. My diver's dress and helmet had been torn from my person by the violence of the explosion, and utterly destroyed; so that it was necessary that I should construct a new suit, or attempt to reach the gold by means of the diving-bell. This latter idea I soon dismissed from my mind; for above all things, in order to be successful, I knew that the power of moving about at the bottom was necessary. Shortly after the catastrophe which had so nearly proved fatal to me, the weather underwent a great change. The long succession of calms and smooth water was followed by storms and tempestuous seas. The equinoctial gales had set in, and until they should have expended their fury it was useless to attempt further diving operations. Accordingly, warned by the threatening appearance of the sky and the falling barometer, we hove up the anchor and put to sea, as it was too dangerous a neighbourhood, surrounded as we were by reefs and sunken rocks, to remain.

After a fortnight's cruise, during which I had time to recruit my strength, and also construct a new

diving-dress, the gales moderated, then died away, and again we had smooth water and gentle southerly breezes.

All my preparations being complete, I once more donned the helmet and dress, and descended to the bottom. It was not without some trepidation that I again ventured; for I had no means of knowing whether the monsters of the deep from which I had so narrowly escaped were still prowling about, or had been injured, perhaps killed, by the explosion. That the latter was the case, I fondly hoped; and, seeing nothing more of my terrible enemies, I had reason to think that this was so. Sharks there were in abundance, but of these I had now no dread. Armed with a large knife and my air-gun, which, being fastened to my wrist by a string, I had fortunately retained, I could bid the monsters defiance. Great was my dismay, however, on arriving at the spot where I had last seen the wreck. A great mound of sand was all I could discover. I suppose that the explosion had torn the crumbling hull to pieces, and then the succession of gales and heavy swell had accumulated this heap of sand. Be this as it might, there was the fact,—the wreck and the treasure it contained was imbedded in many tons of sand, pieces of rock, and other *débris*. To reach it, I saw at once I must dig down into this mass of sand, removing it as I did so. It seemed a Herculean, almost a hopeless task; nevertheless, I set to work with all my energy, and a determination to succeed at all hazards. I caused several tubs and barrels, properly weighted, to be lowered to me; then I, one by one, filled them. They were hauled up and taken away to a distance in the boat, and again emptied into the sea. This was a tedious task, and oftentimes, after a hard day's work, my heart would sink within me at the small progress I had made. I commenced this weary work late in August, and it was the beginning of December before I had removed enough to get near the wreck. My health began to suffer much from the severity of the

labour and the want of air, so that I feared I should break down ere success crowned my efforts. My men, too, began to grumble at this long and tedious delay ; and even the mate talked of giving up so hopeless an undertaking, and returning to San Francisco. The men had been now four months out, and grew impatient to revisit the shore. About this time, to my great dismay, some of the sailors were attacked by scurvy. This was brought on not only by the salt meat and want of vegetables, but by the general gloom and despondency at my continued failure. There were long arrears of wages owing to all, and I had no means of paying them, except by selling the brig. This they knew; and, day by day, as the scurvy got a stronger hold on them, they grew clamorous to return. It was after a violent scene with one of the ringleaders of the mutiny—for they were really in that state—that I descended, determined to make a desperate effort to achieve at least something. Fortune, so long unkind, in this my last extremity, favoured me. I found, where I least expected it, a small, iron-bound box. My heart leaped with joy as I handled it, for I knew by its weight and shape that it was one of the gold boxes. I at once attached it to a rope, and then ascended myself, and ordered the men in the boat to haul up. Thinking it was another tub of sand, they one and all flatly refused, and declared that they would weigh anchor and sail that very evening, whether I wished it or not. Though very angry, I yet made some allowance for their wretched situation, every one of them having swelled wrists and sore mouths from the terrible scurvy. It is true, I myself was in a worse plight. Hard labour, want of air, and worry of mind had reduced me to little better than a skeleton. My face, the whole surface of my body, was of a sickly sallow hue, my eyes bloodshot, my breathing laboured, and lately I had been much troubled with pains in the chest, accompanied by a spitting of blood. But soon after my happy discovery I felt new life, new energy.

"Haul in the rope, you faint hearts! haul up, and see what perseverance has at last done for me."

"That's all very well, skipper," said one, "talking about perseverance. We're all o' us rotting with scurvy, and you want us to keep on hauling up your barrels of sand. I mean to chuck it up myself, so that's the long and short o' it. Come, boys, cut off the cursed rope, and let's go aboard and get the anchor up."

"Haul up the rope, I say; there's gold at the other end."

"Gammon!" said the last speaker; "as much gold as you could put in your eye without hurting your sight."

Then I myself began to haul up the rope, and, seeing my determination, two of the sailors lent me a hand, though only half-convinced I was speaking the truth.

But when the small, iron-bound, heavy box was dragged on board, there was a great change. It was but the work of a moment to break it open, and then out burst the glittering gold. All fine, real gold, bright and pure; for this noble metal will neither tarnish nor rust. The box contained about 1500 ounces, worth nearly 6000*l.* sterling. Involuntarily a cheer broke out from the men as they saw and felt the shining metal. Big Jack, who had been the greatest grumbler, and declared he thought the whole affair was humbug, stood up in the boat, and, waving his hat, gave vent to a loud hurrah.

On board the brig, distant about a quarter of a mile, this was heard; and an answering cheer resounded across the smooth sea.

They well knew what this meant—that at last, after so many months' labour, success had rewarded my efforts. There was no more grumbling now, and the men even declared they would remain while I recovered the whole amount, in spite of the scurvy and salt meat. But I by no means thought this either

judicious or necessary, and determined to sail for San Francisco and lay in a supply of fresh food and vegetables. Singular to say, even before reaching there, a great improvement took place in the men's health. It seemed that the fortunate discovery had almost as great an effect on the health of their bodies as on their minds, and after a week spent in San Francisco harbour all were perfectly recovered, and again we set sail for the coral reef.

After two months' more patient, hard work, I had removed the sand so far as to be able to reach the rest of the gold boxes. The hauling them up occupied three or four days, and, this task accomplished, I proceeded to weigh and apportion the gold. It amounted to even more than I had expected. The amount recovered was over one hundred thousand ounces, and I was by no means certain that more did not yet remain buried in the sand at the bottom. However, at this time a fresh succession of gales set in, and I determined to be content with what I had, even though much might yet remain.

My share alone amounted, in money value, to more than 200,000*l.* sterling, and every one of the sailors had sufficient to keep him in ease and comfort all the days of his life.

It was with glad hearts we, for the last time, weighed anchor, and sailed for San Francisco. I made the mate a present of the brig, although he was so wealthy a man that ten such would have been of no importance either one way or the other.

And then, having bid farewell to my men, I set about the accomplishment of the design, which, through all my struggles and trials, I had kept constantly in view. I purchased a house and piece of ground up the country, near the banks of the Sacramento, close to the place where I had made my first memorable balloon ascent. I bought twenty or thirty bales of silk, and employed some twenty men at liberal wages. I reckoned it would take me at least six

months to complete all my arrangements; and it would then be the time of year when I had made my first ascent.

I designed to ascend with my monster balloon and several smaller ones all connected together and loaded with every imaginable article, both for use during the voyage and after my arrival in the glorious country—the goal of my hopes. At the same time, from the same place, and in the same weather, and with the same wind blowing, I confidently expected that I might, by these means, be again borne far above the clouds through the regions of eternal night, and emerge over the glorious plains, the bright atmosphere, and the lakes, the hills, and valleys of the unknown land. Already, in fancy, I saw the bright beaming eyes of Glorious Golden Hair, her merry smile, as once again I held her in my arms! I pictured to myself a life of happiness and contentment, far from the cares and griefs of this dull earth!

CHAPTER XII.

I CONSTRUCT A MONSTER BALLOON.

THEY call me Victor Volans; it is not my name, but was bestowed on me by those who have known something of my tastes and pursuits, of my aeronautic experiences and adventures. Victor Volans!—it may be freely translated as the Victorious Flyer, and paraphrased in the words Cloud King.

And I am a victor, and a king. I have conquered the subtle ether and made it bear me aloft. I have made myself a king—not only over the clouds, but of men.

Reader, go on with my narrative, and acknowledge that I am worthy of the title—Victor Volans, or the Cloud King!

* * * * *

He was a bold and adventurous man who first conceived and carried out the idea of rendering the unstable element, water, subservient to his genius, and first floated on the bosom of lake, river, or sea, in a boat of his own construction ; that man, perhaps, was even bolder and more adventurous who, by the aid of diving bell or other mechanical appliance, descended into the depths of old ocean, and, surrounded by the shiny monsters of the deep, the wrecks of ages, and the mouldering bones of storm-king victims, wrenched from the sea-god some of his hidden treasures. I am proud to number myself among this latter band ; for did not I, after months of toil and suffering, recover from a sunken wreck a vast treasure, which otherwise might have been there for all time ? My readers know this, and that, after paying all expenses, my share in the recovered treasure was close on 200,000*l*.

But I pride myself most on my balloon adventures and triumphs : soaring miles above the clouds, looking down with scornful eye on paltry, muddy earth, what feelings of exultation thrill my frame ! What though but a slender netting—a flimsy varnished silk—alone restrain the buoyant ether which, ever struggling upwards, bears up me and my slight car?—the very peril lends additional charm, and the thought that but a slight rent in the globe of gas above me would precipitate me headlong to earth (a distance perhaps of five miles, or even more) makes my triumph more complete, and robs danger of its terrors.

Now to commence my story—marvellous, almost incredible, but true !

* * * * *

One year and eight months I have steadily toiled at my great undertaking. “What is that undertaking?” some one may ask ; “what its object ?” I answer, to construct a balloon, so vast in its proportions, so perfect in detail, that in comparison thereto the Great Nassau shall be but a soap-bubble and a clumsy toy.

Reader, transport yourself with me to the banks of the Sacramento river, in California. I have already related the circumstances and events which caused me to select this part of the world for my habitation, and for the carrying out of my grand idea.

I am the undisputed owner of a plot of ground some twenty-five acres in area, situate one mile from the river and four from the nearest gold-field on its banks. I purchased this plot of ground from Government, and my first care was to fence it round securely with a high slab fence. Then around three sides I erected sheds in which my labourers were to work. In the centre I constructed a big, barn-like building, floored with sail-cloth, and roofed with shingles; this was the cutting-out and sewing shop, and here, for more than twelve months, four experienced sailmakers, twenty men, and twenty girls (mostly Indians), were constantly at work. My monster balloon was to contain 2500 gores, and as each gore was doubly stitched and then middle-stitched, the labour, of course, was enormous. I must not forget the varnishing: this is the way I managed it. So soon as fifty gores were stitched together, the piece was taken to one of the sheds which ran round the plot; here it was varnished on both sides, several coats being laid on, and then stretched along some five feet from the ground, and so suspended to dry: it was then laid on one side, and the same process gone through with another piece of fifty gores.

So soon as the fifty pieces, each of fifty gores, were stitched, varnished, and dried, the whole were carefully examined and then laid on one side. I then proceeded to build my ear, erect a gasometer, and make all the other necessary preparations. I have before said that it took me quite six months to fence in my plot of ground, erect the buildings, procure the necessary materials, and mature my scheme. The cost of the silk alone was not less than 25,000*l.*; then there were twenty barrels of fine oil, ten casks each o'

resin, gum, and shellac, besides many other materials, which I will not stay now to particularise. While the gores of the balloon were being stitched together and varnished, I had other workmen employed in making the enormous net which was to enclose the whole. The manufacture of the gas, and the construction of the car, I left to the last. A few words about this car of mine, which I fondly flatter myself was as nearly perfect in every respect as skill, ingenuity, and perseverance could make it.

I first constructed a platform or stage, twenty-five feet square, of strong light laths and wickerwork; around the edges of this, at intervals of a yard, I fixed posts four feet high, and attached to them a strong netting, so as to enclose the entire platform. In the centre of the platform I built a small house, with a door and two windows; this was entirely made of strong laths and wickerwork, but I plentifully daubed the interstices with thick varnish, which I allowed to dry, so as to make the house both airproof and waterproof. I likewise lined it both inside and outside with silk, which I again varnished. The door did not work on hinges, but slid backwards and forwards in grooves, and I so arranged that, when closed, it could be made perfectly air-tight. The windows were formed of sheets of talc, which I judged to be better than glass. Every crack and crevice was carefully varnished, so that no breath of air could enter without my wish. Two pipes fitted with valves led from the interior and passed through the sides; one of these was for expelling the foul air, the other for pumping in fresh. And now let me explain my reasons for this elaborate arrangement.

It is well known that aeronauts at a great height suffer much from pain and difficulty of breathing, on account of the rarity of the air. I cast about me for means to obviate this serious inconvenience. After months of thought, I felt persuaded that I **had** succeeded.

"Eureka!" I cried enthusiastically, and set to work at my air-tight house. My plan was this :

I provided two powerful air-pumps, and with these, and the other necessary apparatus, I shut myself in my house, and carefully and hermetically sealed up every crevice by means of coats of varnish.

One pump was fitted to the exit pipe ; this was occasionally to expel the foul air.

With the other pump I pumped in large quantities of fresh air. Now, as I pumped in by one pipe at least double as much as I suffered to escape by the other, it is obvious that in a very short time the air must become much denser : I did not leave this to conjecture, but verified it by observation.

I took in with me a barometer, and accurately noted it before I commenced pumping. The quicksilver stood at 31·50 inches. As I pumped it gradually rose, till, in half an hour, it stood at 35 inches : in an hour it stood at 38·75. The density of the air was now oppressive, and having demonstrated my theory by actual experiment, I resolved to let it escape by the exit pipe. Accordingly, keeping my eye on the barometer, I raised the valve. The compressed air rushed out with a roaring, whistling sound, and the mercury in the barometer fell rapidly, till it stood again at 31·50. Theory and practice coincided perfectly, and with feelings of joy and triumph I am unable to describe, I opened the door and stepped from my balloon-house.

There was yet another danger which I was determined to provide against : I might be blown out to sea by the treacherous winds, and, by reason of some accident to my balloon, be compelled to descend.

The thought struck me, why should not I provide myself with a boat—a life-boat of the best and lightest construction ? Accordingly, I made a journey to San Francisco, and purchased one suitable to my purpose. It was twenty-three feet long, and weighed only 230 pounds. It was built on the newest and most ap-

proved principle; and, though it might be dashed to pieces on a rock, could not possibly be upset. This I secured beneath the platform in such a manner that it could be detached at a moment's notice; I cut a trap-door in the platform, through which to descend in a case of emergency. I have said that my balloon-house had only two windows; but all round the sides, at intervals of about a yard, I had cut round holes, each about the size of a saucer, and in these had fixed strong pieces of talc. There were also five in the roof,—one in the centre, and one in each corner,—and four in the floor.

Thus, though boxed up in my air-tight house, I could command a view above, beneath, and all around.

After I had satisfactorily demonstrated the possibility of condensing the air, I turned my thoughts to another subject which gave me great uneasiness. In all my former ascents, and especially in the last, when I attained a greater height than ever before, I had suffered intensely from the cold; indeed, on several occasions the cold was so bitter, that I was nearly frozen to death. Now, in my monster balloon, I purposed ascending certainly as high, perhaps higher; and should certainly be many days, perhaps weeks, in the clouds. How could I secure a sufficient degree of warmth to support life?

Although my house was air-tight, I knew that the extreme cold of the air without would soon reduce the temperature of that within to its own level. Warm clothing and furs might be of partial avail; but the more I thought, the more I felt convinced of the necessity of artificial heat. But there was a tremendous difficulty in the way. To support combustion there must be air, and that, of course, must be supplied from without. Now I was well aware that in the case of so large a balloon, notwithstanding every precaution, there must be a great leakage. Then, too, I should be occasionally obliged to allow gas to escape by the valves; as a consequence, the atmosphere

round the balloon and house would constantly be mixed with hydrogen gas, and this mixture of course would enter the house by the pipe.

Herein lay the difficulty. Hydrogen gas mixed with common air forms a highly explosive compound; and should this mixture reach the fire, I might fairly expect house, platform, and all to be blown to "smithereens."

Even if this did not happen, a jet of hydrogen might enter by the pipe, catch fire, and communicate without. Then imagine a roaring blast, with which the vast body of gas in the balloon would catch fire,—imagine the terrific explosion, the crash and headlong fall from heaven to earth! I shuddered at the idea.

After much thought and scheming, I concluded that I had hit upon a plan by which I might maintain a small fire in safety.

In the first place, I constructed a small stove, in such a way that I could instantly exclude all air, and so extinguish the fire. Then, at the end of the pipe by which I pumped in air, I fixed a simple apparatus, by which I could tell when ever so small a quantity of hydrogen was entering. By means of a tube, I caused the air to come in contact with a delicate and infallible test for hydrogen gas. Directly I received warning, I stopped the supply of air, and extinguished the fire in the stove. Then I determined to cause the balloon to descend, in order to pass from the mixed atmosphere of hydrogen in which it might be placed.

I frequently put this to the test by sealing myself up in my house, lighting the stove, and then causing the house to be surrounded by gas. I never failed to receive notice of even the smallest quantity.

So far, so good: here were two difficulties, which at first appeared insurmountable, completely overcome. Assuredly, fortune was in my favour, and my heart bounded with hope and exultation as I reviewed what I *had done*, and thought of what I *would do*.

Yes, Glorious Golden Hair! queen of ~~that~~ glorious

country which I had visited in my last balloon voyage, I will return to you; I will return laden with the treasures of the civilised world, of which you and yours know nothing. My balloon shall bear to you books, to instruct in the marvels of science, the wonders of the heavens, and the history, past and present, of this our planet; philosophical instruments, chemical apparatus and ingredients, machinery, tools, and all those appliances by which I hope to raise an intelligent and wonderful people from barbarism to civilisation and a knowledge of the great facts of science and philosophy. Then shall I be indeed a king!

But I am digressing. After completing and perfecting my house in every respect, I proceeded to join together the parts of my vast balloon; this, and the work of encasing it in its netting, occupied several weeks.

At the last moment I bethought me of yet another expedient. I knew well, both from theory and actual experience, that, supposing my balloon to be full of gas when I started, on reaching the higher regions it would rarefy and expand, and, if not allowed to escape by the valves, would burst the balloon. Now, if allowed to escape into the air, it was of course gone for ever,—so much gas wasted. This was a very serious consideration.

I set my wits to work to provide a remedy. To the neck of the large balloon, and beneath it, I attached a small one, about a tenth part of its size, and resolved, on ascending, to allow this lesser balloon to hang empty. Thus, when I ascended, the expanding gas, instead of being dissipated in air, would pass into this, and be retained.

With this last experiment I concluded my labours on the balloon, house, and platform, and had now only to turn my attention to the manufacture of the gas, and my outfit and equipment for the voyage. So, having satisfied myself by minute examination that everything was in complete and perfect order, I went down

to San Francisco with two bullock-drays, to purchase and bring up what articles I intended taking with me.

Nine months previously, I had written to England for many articles which I could not procure in California, to be sent out to San Francisco. These, I knew, had by this time arrived.

CHAPTER XIII.

I MEET AN OLD FRIEND.

MY first visit in San Francisco was to a mathematical and philosophical instrument maker, who was employed in constructing various apparatus for me.

I packed a large case with a complete set of chemical apparatus, several galvanic batteries with oxygen jars and coils, a large plate and cylinder electrical machine, and an assortment of chemicals and reagents. I also purchased a small copper still and worm-tub, several gas bladders with stop-cocks, and a complete set of apparatus for the oxy-hydrogen light and blow-pipe. I provided a good supply of india-rubber and glass tubing, as well as glass and other vessels of every description, so that I could, with the appliances at my command, manufacture any other apparatus I might require. I also procured a small portable steam-engine, and several working models of fixed and locomotive engines. Having laid in a supply of all the various parts, I could at any time, by the aid of the models, construct a larger one than my limited store would allow. I purchased a quadrant and sextant, artificial horizon theodolite-level, azimuth compass, a large repeating telescope, and several powerful microscopes, besides a great variety of astronomical instruments. I also purchased several air-guns of the best construction, and gave orders for two small cannons to be made on the same principle. I also bought two small brass howitzers, to be fitted in the usual way,

and gunpowder, and a chestful of rifles, pistols, and double-barrelled fowling-pieces.

Having procured all these things, I turned my footsteps towards the warehouses on the quay, for I had learned that the goods I had ordered from England had arrived, and were now lying in bond. As I passed a small liquor-store facing one of the wharves, I heard a voice behind me :

“Ullo, gub'nor! ba Jumbo, how you do?”

I turned, and saw a swarthy individual, attired only in cotton shirt and pants. A broad grin was on his dusky features; and I at once recognised an old acquaintance,—one Ramoon, a Ceylon diver, who had been of immense service to me in recovering the treasure from the wreck.

“Halloa, Ramoon!” I said, shaking him by the hand. “Is that you? Where on earth have you sprung from?”

“War me sprung from, gub'nor! Why, me jes come in ship from Trincomalee, war me live when me's to home.”

“Well, Ramoon, why did you not stop there?”

“Dat's all verra well, you say why me no stop dar. Me spend all de money; no like go pearl divin' agin, cos he make him blin',—make him mind bad,—so dis chicken jest ship hisself aboard 'Merican ship *Black Swan*; and here me am. Ba Jumbo! gub'nor, you no want active young feller, ch? Dis chicken's game.”

These words set me thinking. I had long been at a loss as to who to take with me on my next balloon journey, for so large a machine could be better handled by two than one. Then, too, the companionship of a fellow-being would be a great boon. Hitherto, however, I had been at a loss as to whom I could possibly take. I had no friends. My workmen looked upon me as a mad visionary, as did all with whom I came in contact. Indeed, I had almost made up my mind to ascend alone, seeing no possibility of finding any congenial spirit to share my dangers and triumphs,

when Ramoon so unexpectedly turned up, as if dropped from the clouds on purpose.

I knew the fellow well. He was docile, intelligent, and, though absurdly superstitious, brave, and true as steel. He was a native of Ceylon, in the East Indies, and his youth had been passed in pearl-diving. Tiring of this, he had gone to sea, first in a native vessel, afterwards in an American brig, till, at the time of which I speak, he was a very tolerable seaman.

He had been of great service to me in my diving operations on the wreck, when I recovered the treasure, and I was extremely glad to have again tumbled across him.

"Let us come in here," I said to him, leading the way to a liquor-store; "I want to have a talk to you, Ramoon."

"Or right, gub'nor; talk away—o'ny stand a nobbler. Dis chicken's kinder dry."

Ramoon's dialect was an absurd *patois*, compounded of sea phrases, nigger talk, and Yankeeisms.

I called for a pint of brown brandy, and glasses (I knew my dusky friend's weakness of old), and, passing through the bar, entered a sort of yard or garden at the rear. This was provided with tables and seats, each table being in a sort of alcove by itself, such as you see at tea-gardens and the like.

I took a seat at one of these tables, and motioned Ramoon to do likewise.

"Now, Ramoon," I said, after he had filled his glass, "do you want a ship? or haven't you spent all your dollars yet?"

"Spent 'em all long 'go, cap'n," he said, mournfully shaking his head.

"Ah! then you want to earn some more, I suppose?"

"Right you is, gub'nor. You got ship?"

"Yes, I've got a fine ship. A ship which can navigate the air."

"Nabigate de hair! Ba golly! what's dat?" cried Ramoon, putting his hand up to his straight black locks. "I don't tink dis chicken's hair want's nabigatin'—leastwise, not jis now."

"I say, Ramoon," I said, laughing, "you've been down in the sea before, haven't you?—would you like to go again?"

"Oh, dat's your little caper, air it!" he replied, "Not wid dis chicken, gub'nor. No, you don't—not in dese boots. Dis infant ain't a-gwine down no more for de wrecks. Gumbo! you tink me forget dat man wot lib at de bottom of de sea, wid de spike in him head, and no arms? Ramoon no dive no more till you catch him man-jumper and de big-jaw snapping devil."

"Oh, nonsense, Ramoon! they were both blown to picces when I exploded the gunpowder under the wreck."

"P'r'aps 'em was—p'r'aps 'em wasn't," said Ramoon decisively. "Anyhow, dis chicken ain't a-gwine down no more, nohow you can fix it."

"But look here, Ramoon: listen to me. No one wants you to go down any more. I want you to come up this time."

"Sally come up, Sally go down,
Sally come up de middle,"

hummed Ramoon, grinning from ear to ear, and showing his white teeth.

"I tell you, I want you to come up in the clouds with me—not down in the sea."

"Or right, gub'nor; dis chicken's ready any hour you's a-gwine to get dere. Dessay it's a fust-rate place up dar," pointing with his finger to the clouds; "but ain't the road up the hill rayther too steep, gub'nor?"

Ramoon chuckled immensely at this witticism.

"Ramoon, you're a fool!" I said angrily.

"Yes, gub'nor: got de prize in dat class once."

"I tell you, I've got a machine for mounting up in

—a great machine, which I have been more than a year and a half constructing.”

Ramoon suddenly dropped off his seat, and falling with his back on the ground, commenced kicking his legs, and screaming with laughter.

“Oh, ba Jumbo, gub'nor, you're a rum chile! He bin down in de sea, and pretty nigh chawed up and spiked, and now he's a-gwine up in de clouds wid a divin'-bell. Yah, yah, yah! ho-o-o-o!”

When he had somewhat recovered from his fit of laughter, he picked himself up.

“Scuse me, gub'nor; couldn't help it. Up in de clouds in a divin'-bell!—oh, you is a bully diver!”

“It is not a diving-bell, it is a balloon; and I am not a diver, but an aeronaut,” I said angrily.

“Just say dem words agin, gub'nor; couldn't quite catch 'em.”

I repeated “balloon” and “aeronaut.”

“A baroon and a nairysnort! Ba Jumbo, I s'pose dat eos you is such a 'ring-tailed snorter.' A nairysnort and a baroon! I say, gub'nor, you ain't got the baroon wid you, I s'pose?”

“No,” I replied, laughing heartily; “but you shall see it, if you'll come up to the Sacramento with me.”

Ramoon seemed in deep thought for a moment, then said:

“I say, gub'nor, what you a-gwine up dere for? Dere ain't no wrecks, is dere?”

“No; no wrecks there, Ramoon.”

“Then, what's you a-gwine to be a nairysnorter for? What is dere up dere in de clouds?—is it oysters?”

“Oysters!” I said, laughing loudly; “what on earth put that in your head?”

“Oysters—pearl-oysters. If dar ain't no pearl-oysters, and no wrecks, what's de good of being a nairysnorter, and gwine up in divin'-bell—a baroon, I mean?”

I found it impossible to beat sense into his head; so I resolved to desist from the attempt until I took

him with me to my work-yard, and showed him the car and balloon. But Ramoon's curiosity was now excited, and he continued putting question after question, interlarded with his own comments, till I was fairly tired, and rose to go.

I had not observed that the next alcove was occupied, or that its inmate, a little shrivelled old man, had been listening intently to every word of our conversation. When I rose to go, however, he left his seat, and, standing in my path, politely raised his hat.

"Monsieur, I salute you. I have overheard some of your conversation, and beg to introduce myself as a brother aeronaut."

"Oh, ba Jumbo!" I heard Ramoon exclaim, "hyar's anoder snorter!"

"Indeed, sir!" I said, with some curiosity; "have you made many ascents?"

"My last was the 130th; and hitherto I have only had one serious accident."

We were soon in earnest conversation, Ramoon walking behind, and listening in mute wonder to our discourse of "valves," "highest power," "cubic feet," "expansion," "leakage," "grapnels," "varnish," "coagulation," and a thousand other things of deep interest to ourselves.

The upshot was, that I invited the Frenchman, whose name was Monsieur Girardin, to dine with me that day, and on the following one to accompany me, and inspect my balloon and apparatus.

I soon discovered that my new acquaintance was perfectly frantic on one subject. He had, he declared, discovered the right form for a parachute. Hitherto, he said, they had been made somewhat in the shape of an umbrella in the position it would be held in a shower. M. Girardin stoutly maintained, and endeavoured to demonstrate to me mathematically, that the proper shape was that of an inverted umbrella, with a hole in the centre, and the ends of the attaching cords fastened all round the rim.

Although I thought I could discover some errors in the mathematical formula by which he endeavoured to prove his case, there was yet so much sound sense and ingenuity in his arguments, that I was disposed to treat his theory with some respect. I must confess, however, that I was somewhat startled when he boldly proposed to attach his parachute beneath my balloon, ascend some four miles, and then sever the connection, and practically prove, by a safe descent, the truth of his theory.

On arriving at my work-yard, on the banks of the Sacramento, I at once commenced making final arrangements for preparing the gas to inflate my balloon. Before doing this, however, I thoroughly fitted and arranged all the apparatus which I proposed taking with me ; I also provided several bales of silk, in order that I might repair my balloon if necessary. I took a barrel of flour, another of biscuits, a good supply of dried meat, and also preserved provisions enough for a month's consumption ; a few casks of water, a keg of brandy, and a small cask of wine, completed my stock of drinkables. In the interior of the house I stowed away about a ton of coals, and all around the platform I placed bags of sand, about a hundred in number : this was my ballast, and by throwing out portions I could so increase my buoyant power as to rise to any height I wished. I covered in the whole of the house and platform up to the neck of the balloon with network. After I had placed all these articles on the platform and in the house, I found by careful calculation that my balloon would still have a lifting power to spare of almost a ton. Accordingly I nearly neutralised this by laying in more provisions, another bale of silk, and some live stock ; this done, I half filled my gas retorts with coal, lighted the furnaces, and commenced the manufacture of the gas. After it had been purified by the proper means, I conducted it into a gasometer I had constructed, and commenced to inflate the enormous bag of silk that was to bear me

aloft. This was a very tedious operation ; at the end of three weeks it was barely half inflated, and lay on the ground like some huge unwieldy monster ; slowly, however, as the supply of gas was kept up, it began to rear its huge bulk, and an occasional lazy flutter told that it was fast quickening into life. Whilst I was at work superintending these operations, Monsieur Girardin was busy constructing the parachute : so zealously did he labour at his task, that he had it completed before I had fully inflated my balloon. It was in shape like an inverted umbrella. The framework was of iron, covered with strong varnished canvas. Ropes were attached to the car, which was in shape like an apple-basket, at the edges of the circular hole in the centre. I have said that it was like an inverted umbrella in shape, but a funnel with the spout cut off will give a better idea.

At the end of a month my balloon was nearly inflated, and made desperate efforts to escape from the cords which held it. I now, with the assistance of seventy men, dragged the monster across the enclosure, and securely attached it to the house, platform, and life boat. So soon as the cords were loosened, it at once, and with the greatest ease, lifted the whole apparatus from the ground. The excitement and curiosity of the inhabitants of the neighbourhood were raised to the highest pitch as the vast monster slowly upheaved its dome-like shape far above the trees. The gates of the yard were constantly besieged by a curious crowd, anxious to get a glimpse of my enormous machine.

In two days more it was fully inflated ; so great was its buoyant power, that although the ropes that held it to earth were as large as ships' hawsers, I yet feared sometimes that it would burst from its bonds and soar away.

At last the eventful day came ; the balloon was filled ; every thing was in order ; the car and boat were securely attached, and round the latter the rope was

fastened to the parachute ; the platform and house were held suspended at a distance of some thirty feet from the ground. All being in readiness, I paid my labourers, and ascended the rope-ladder which led from the parachute to the platform.

Ramoon followed me up, and Monsieur Girardin having taken his seat on the car of the parachute, I prepared to give the word to cast off. First, however, I carefully examined all the valves ; this I accomplished by climbing up the network like a ladder. After a careful examination I was satisfied that every thing was in working order, and again descended to the platform. I gave one last lingering look to the earth I was about to leave, perhaps for ever ; then waved a small flag as a signal. Next moment a shout rent the air ; I felt a whirling, rushing sensation, a heavy pressure on the soles of my feet, and, unable to keep my balance, fell. I scrambled to my feet almost instantly, and, clinging to the ropes, looked over the edge of the platform.

Imagine my amazement ! I looked out in utter bewilderment. Where was the earth ? Gone, vanished from my sight, and I was floating in space far above the clouds. Below me, at a distance apparently of about half a mile, stretched a broad expanse of white, fleecy vapour. This was a layer of clouds ; and so marvellously rapid had been my ascent, that in the space of these few seconds the balloon had, rocket-like, shot up to this vast elevation. I now took a speaking-trumpet, and, leaning over the edge of the platform, shouted down to my friend in the parachute.

“Are you all right down there ?”

“Perfectly so, my friend,” he replied ; “but I have let the string slip, and cannot release the parachute.”

“What will you do ?” I asked.

“Eh bien,” he replied, “I must trouble you to cut the rope.”

This, however, at the moment, I had neither time

nor inclination to do, for the balloon was still rising with tremendous velocity ; already the compensator was full with the expansion of the gas, which threatened to burst the silk. Accordingly, shouting to the balloon to help me, I pulled with all my strength at the string of the large valve. Unfortunately, however, this would not work ; in vain I tugged and hauled—the line had somehow got jammed between the network and the balloon. I then pulled the string of the smaller valves, and with that the gas rushed out with a shrill, screaming sound ; still, it was necessary that I should free the large valve ; so, nerving myself for the undertaking, I commenced climbing up the network of the balloon. This was both difficult and dangerous, and the balloon swayed about in a wild and ungovernable manner, probably from the excess of gas. It was now intensely cold ; my fingers were quite blue and numbed, and I began to fear I should freeze to death before accomplishing my task. At last the valve is clear, and I commence my descent : about half-way down my foot slips, and my whole weight comes suddenly upon the mesh of the net, which I grasp in my right hand ; it gives way ! I partially seize another : this, too, unable to bear the sudden jerk, snaps like packthread. I am lost !

One cry of horror, one frenzied prayer, and I feel myself falling, falling, falling, through space !

CHAPTER XIV.

I REGAIN THE BALLOON, AND LIGHT A FIRE.

THOSE only who have fallen or have leaped from even a moderate height can imagine my feelings for the few seconds before I lost all consciousness. I knew I was turning over and over in the air, while a whirling, rushing sensation rendered me totally blind. I knew I was grazing against some ropes, which, though I frantically

endeavoured to grasp them, did not stay my headlong fall. These ropes were hanging loose from the balloon, forming a sort of ornamental fringe, and were blown about by the currents of air in all directions. I just remember feeling one whirl around my body like a whip for a moment, without, however, checking my descent ; and then I lost all consciousness. My last thought, or rather sensation, was a hope that I might be dead before I reached earth.

Falling—falling—down—down—down—a blind inert mass rushing through the air at a height of some four miles.

All is an utter blank—so far as feeling and consciousness are concerned ; I am already dead.

Crash !

A terrible stunning shock for a moment awakes me to sense and feeling, only again to send me into obliviousness by its effect.

I remember feeling the blood rushing from my mouth, nose, and ears. I remember wondering at not being quite dead—at even having enough life left to wonder, after so terrible a fall. Then again all sense left me, and I died ; at least, my impression was, as consciousness faded away, that this indeed was death.

* * * * *

How long I lay in this state I know not ; but at last I awoke to a feeling of pain and intense cold. I opened my eyes ; and saw above me the heavens studded with stars. By degrees I gathered that I was lying in a very confined space, and that some one was tending me and watching.

“Pauvre enfant ! you shall be verra mosh bru’se, I tink. Take leetle drop d’eau de vie.”

Then I felt a flask pressed to my mouth, and brandy poured down my throat. Invigorated by the spirit, I soon regained my senses ; and though I was unable to move, and my sight was dim, I was enabled to recognise the voice of M. Girardin, and recall all the circumstances of the ascent and the fall.

Where was I?—what has happened?—and how came the Frenchman by me? One thing was certain—I was not dead. Then suddenly an idea dawned on me. Girardin had seen me fall; had at once liberated the parachute to ascertain my fate, and had found me lying bleeding on the earth.

But by what miracle had I escaped? Was it indeed possible I could have survived a sheer fall of above 21,000 feet?

Where was I?—that was the next question I asked myself. Feeling capable of a little motion, I stretched out my hand. It encountered rough basketwork of some description. Then I opened my eyes, and my sight was now much more distinct. Imagine my amazement when I discerned floating above me—the balloon!

Then by slow steps the truth came to me, and casting my eyes around I realised my position.

I had fallen into the parachute, and thus been saved.

I now remembered feeling one of the ropes coil round my body for a moment. This had doubtless swung me to one side, and the parachute at the same time oscillating towards me, I had fallen into it, much to the astonishment of M. Girardin. The car of the parachute had been constructed to hold one only, consequently I was partly propped up in it, partly leaning over. I was terribly bruised and shaken, but fortunately no bones were broken; so in the course of half an hour I was sufficiently recovered to change my position, and converse with the Frenchman.

“How long have I been insensible?” I asked.

“About six hours. I thought you were dead once; but the cold brought you round.”

Furthermore, he told me he did not see me fall; the first notification of the fact being my coming crash on to the parachute, and falling through the hole into the basket.

Now it became a question how I was to ascend to my car. The cold was intense, and I feared

if I could not regain the car and seek shelter in the house, the wounds and bruises I had received would mortify. There was a deep gash on the forehead which gave me especial uneasiness. It had ceased bleeding, and was utterly devoid of feeling.

"Shout up to Ramoon," I said to my companion ; "my voice is too weak to be heard. Tell him to send down a rope with a bow-line, and then reeve through a block and take to the winch. Thus he will be able to haul me up as far as the keel of the lifeboat. There is no doubt I shall be able to climb the ladder there, and gain the car." Girardin followed my directions, and while Ramoon was uncoiling and lowering the rope I looked out and around. At a distance beneath us of about half a mile was a sea of white clouds ; and carefully examining these, I was enabled to detect, through rents in the white expanse, that beneath lay the ocean. Fortunately, before my fall I had left one of the small valves open, and in consequence thereof gas had been slowly and steadily escaping. This had the effect of causing the balloon to descend slowly, so that we were not now more than two miles above the sea instead of four.

Having fastened the bow-line securely round my body, I gave the signal to Ramoon to haul up, I assisting as far as in my power by climbing the rope ladder. I regained the platform in safety.

Ramoon had seen me fall ; but not into the parachute—nor could he see this latter on account of the projecting rim of the platform. His astonishment, then, at my reappearance was prodigious ; for when the Frenchman told him to lower a rope, and haul up again, he had no idea what he was pulling up.

After gazing in speechless surprise for some half-minute, he spoke :

"Ba Jumbo, gub'nor, you is a tumbler ! For I see you go down fast enuff ; but how de doose you jump up agen, dis chicken can't make out nohow."

I was in no mood to stop talking, for I suffered

much pain from my wounds and the cold, so at once unfastened the door of the hut and entered.

"Send the rope down for M. Girardin," I said; "and shout to him that he had better come up and get warm, for as we are now over the sea, it is impossible he can descend in his parachute."

In five minutes the Frenchman joined me, and then, after having stopped the escape of gas, I threw out about fifty pounds of ballast, for we were still descending. I shut the door, and having hermetically sealed it, lit the fire in my stove. Before entering, I had scraped some snow together, which had collected on the platform, and now proceeded to rub my half-frozen wounds therewith—knowing from experience that this is the best treatment for frost-bites.

Soon the return of sensation and the flow of blood told me that circulation had come back. I then carefully instructed Girardin how to watch and tell by the indicator when hydrogen gas was entering with the air. Ramoon I placed at the air-pump, and told him to pump in fresh air about every five minutes. Then having, as I thought, provided for every emergency, I wrapped myself in a buffalo rug, and, nestling close to the stove, dropped off into a sound sleep.

CHAPTER XV.

A MINIATURE SNOW-STORM—OUR FIRST MEAL IN THE CLOUDS —THE MYSTERIOUS NOISE.

I AWOKE with a feeling of oppression and difficulty of breathing. Looking around I saw, through the plate of tempered glass placed in front for that purpose, that the fire in the stove, though not quite out, burned but feebly. The interior of my cloud-house was shrouded in deep gloom, and from that I judged the balloon must be in a dense cloud, as otherwise the

stars in the clear atmosphere of the upper regions would give ample light.

I called on Girardin and Ramoon, and, receiving no answer, commenced to search for them. Both were fast asleep, and the oppression and feeling of stupor I experienced were caused by the latter ceasing to pump in air. Indeed, I soon became painfully aware that the air was heavily charged with carbonic acid gas—the fumes from the stove being added to that caused by three persons breathing in so confined a space.

When I succeeded in finding my two companions, I endeavoured in vain to wake them, for the deleterious vapour had completely stupefied them. First, I sprinkled them with water I drew from the barrel, and finding this not enough, I removed the fastenings and opened the door. I at once saw that we were in a dense black cloud. Instantly the piercing, icy-cold air rushed in, sweeping into every corner of the house—enough to freeze the marrow in one's bones.

Then occurred a marvellous phenomenon. Although there was neither rain nor snow falling outside, the whole interior of the hut was quickly full of large white flakes, which falling, covered the whole floor, and even my two sleeping companions. At that moment the balloon emerged from the cloud, and into the bright star and moonlight, which shone full on this diminutive snow-storm, causing each flake to glisten and shine gloriously as it fell fluttering to the ground.

A moment's thought gave me the explanation of this phenomenon. Within the hut the air was charged with watery vapour, proceeding both from our breath, and the slow evaporation of the water in the barrel. Then, when a sudden stream of icy-cold air was admitted, a miniature snow-storm followed, and from the same cause which produces a real one. The watery vapour became suddenly condensed and half-frozen, and fell in numerous snow-flakes, producing the most beautiful and marvellous effect I had ever

seen. The piercing blast aroused Ramoon and the Frenchman, and they were quickly cowering round the stove, almost perished with the sudden and intense cold. I took down the thermometer, and, holding it outside the door for a few moments, noted that it stood at fifteen degrees below zero.

Then I closed the door, and, after admonishing Ramoon not again to go to sleep at the force-pump, and so imperil all our lives, I devoted my attention to my wounds and bruises. The moon, shining through the circular glass and talc-plates, gave ample light, so that I was enabled to apply some friar's balsam, and then strap them up properly. This done, and all pain having vanished, I now felt the cravings of hunger, and set about my first meal above the clouds. I had a good store of small and compact cooking utensils, so at once proceeded to prepare the repast.

First, I carefully pulled all the valve-strings, to make sure they were closed; then I inspected my hydrogen test; and, satisfied that all was right, at once commenced to make a good clear fire.

This done, and a kettle of water boiling, I made a large pot of coffee, heated some milk, and then set to work on the solid food. I had plenty of hard biscuit; but, as my head and mouth were sore, and my tongue was cut by my fall, I resolved to make some pancakes in preference. This I easily effected, and placed on top of the stove; then I put a dozen eggs on to boil, and cutting some rashers from one of the hams, proceeded to broil them. The interior of the hut was soon fragrant with the appetising odour; and seating myself on the floor, I invited Ramoon and Girardin to do likewise, and was soon engaged discussing, with infinite gusto, my first meal in the clouds. Assuredly, I do not believe that any body had ever before so enjoyed a meal, and feel quite certain that no one ever did under the like conditions.

There we were, absolutely miles above the clouds, floating in the clear vault of heaven, rising yet higher

and higher, with a more intense cold prevailing without than had ever been experienced by Arctic voyagers, calmly eating broiled ham and eggs, and drinking hot coffee. The very novelty of the thing gave increased gusto to the meal, and for the time I lost all thought of the peril I had gone through, my almost miraculous escape, and the dangers and toils which doubtless awaited me in the future.

Oh, for a painter, to have transferred that scene to canvas! The small square house, partly illumined by the red glare of the stove, partly by the white moonshine gleaming through the round glass windows. Ramoon sat in such a position that his copper countenance was in the full blaze of the firelight, which caused his face to appear all in a glare, or red-hot. Monsieur Girardin, on the contrary, sat behind the stove; and the moonlight, streaming full on his sallow features, dark beard, and large sunken eyes, gave him a ghostly, corpse-like look, dreadful to behold.

Then, too, the various effects produced on the interior and its contents by the two lights, was something quite weird-like and marvellous. But, though busily employed in discussing this aerial meal, I did not forget to cast frequent glances through the many windows I had provided: through the top, at the vast balloon, a small portion of which only could be seen; and through the sides and bottom, at the great vacancy around the rolling sheets of cloud below. I had the barometer and thermometer in such a position outside one of the windows that I could see without going out. The thermometer stood at 30 degrees below zero, and the barometer indicated that we had attained an altitude of about $6\frac{1}{2}$ miles. Wishing to ascertain in what direction we were being borne by the current, I carefully scanned the view beneath me; and fixing on a small white cloud some mile or so below, took its bearing accurately by the compass. It lay S.W., and after a lapse of ten minutes I found it exactly

beneath. So that, supposing the cloud to be stationary, we were drifting very rapidly in a south-westerly direction. It is true that in all probability the cloud itself was being borne along by some current of air, but as I could not see the earth, I had no better means of judging. At all events, the clouds beneath were either stationary or moving in a north-easterly direction, and in any case it was pretty certain that I was being drifted the way I wished.

I now began to feel considerable inconvenience from the rarity of the air, for Ramoon had long since left off pumping in. I set him to work again at once, and directing the Frenchman's attention to the valves, to see all acted well, I occupied myself in clearing away the remnants of our repast. This done, I brewed a hot glass of whisky punch apiece, and prepared for a quarter of an hour's *dolce far niente* before opening the door and encountering the terrific cold which reigned without, in order to navigate our air-ship. While thus employed, I heard a strange, rattling, cracking sound without, as though countless panes of glass were falling all around.

What could it be?

I looked out, but could discern nothing. After a little time, however, I perceived various bright, sparkling objects falling in all directions. Sometimes a few seconds would elapse without any, and then the space around would be filled with a shower of sparkles falling on all sides and glistening beautifully in the moonlight.

The rattling and cracking increased, as did my amazement.

What could it mean?

CHAPTER XVI.

SHOWERS OF DIAMONDS!—THE MYSTERY SOLVED!—INTENSE COLD—MY EYES ARE FROZEN OPEN—THE SLEEP OF DEATH.

DETERMINED to solve the mystery, and that at once, I hurriedly proceeded to extinguish the fire in the stove. This done, I carefully laid it again, so that I could light it in a very short time, and then proceeded to wrap myself in the very thickest and warmest clothing I could find, carefully covering up my whole face, with the exception of a peep-hole for the eyes, and putting large gloves on my hands. The mysterious noise still continued: and, not without an inward shudder at the fearful temperature I was about to expose myself to, I proceeded to scrape away the varnish with which I had hermetically closed up every crevice, and, removing as quickly as possible the fastenings, opened the door.

The instant I did so, the cold blast rushed in, and the same phenomenon, only in a more intensified form, again occurred. This time, instead of snow, the floating moisture of the air within the house was turned instantly into ice, and soon small hailstones were falling and rattling all around.

I at once stepped out on to the platform, and looked around. At first I did not feel the intense cold, and looked about me without inconvenience.

Never shall I forget the glorious scene which burst on my astonished gaze! My first glance, sailor-like, was above my head at the balloon. If all the diamond merchants who ever existed had had placed at their disposal all the diamonds in the Diamond Valley visited by Sindbad the Sailor; also, all the gems which Aladdin's lamp could have procured, and all that ever have been seen in the world,—they would have failed utterly in producing one tithe of the glorious sight I now witnessed. The whole vast dome of the balloon was enveloped, as it were, in a diamond mantle,

glittering with transcendent lustre in the moonlight. A glorious shower of glittering gems was falling in all directions; and this it was which caused the rattling noise which had so amazed me. Falling on all sides in a glittering, dazzling shower, apparently coming from the stars above, and sprinkling down with a fluttering motion, like that of butterflies, then disappearing in the vast abyss below.

Lost in astonishment at this glorious sight, I stand as one spellbound, not heeding the intense cold. Presently, while still gazing on the marvellous vision, a shower of these heavenly gems falls all around me, on me. I reach out my hand and catch some: behold the mystery is solved!—the diamond shower is in reality exquisitely thin sheets of newly-formed ice!

We had entered a region where some watery vapour had been, and this had been turned into ice by the cold, and now, being heavier than the atmosphere, fell fluttering towards the earth. Towards the earth, I say, since I well knew it would never reach it; for long before it could do so, a warmer stratum would be entered, the ice again become water, and the water vapour.

Though my diamond vision was thus dissipated, I felt much consolation in the thought that no emperor, king, or earthly potentate had ever witnessed so glorious a sight, and in all probability none ever would.

I now, though turning reluctantly from the splendid sight, gazed beneath me.

There, also, a splendid scene awaited my view. The clouds below had all vanished; the earth, or rather the ocean, lay spread beneath in all its silent grandeur; it appeared like an enormous disc, and at the great height we had now attained I could even perceive its convexity—its globular shape. I even fancied, from the peculiar effect the moon had, that had the rays of the sun been shining on its surface it would have produced a luminous effect such as the moon itself and the planets present to us observers on the earth's surface.

My breathing now became very laborious from the extreme rarity of the air, and I also began to feel a dizziness and trembling of the limbs. Still, I was loth to leave a post where the wonderful and the beautiful were so gloriously displayed to my enraptured vision.

The moon was now slowly sinking in the west, and as I gazed she disappeared in a mass of dark cloud which seemed to upheave itself in the far west to meet her. I now walked around the platform, and proceeded to inspect the state of affairs in general.

I found all the animals I had brought up with me dead—stiff and stark from the cold—frozen to death. I felt a momentary regret as I thought of my carelessness and cruelty in subjecting the poor brutes to a cold which no living thing could withstand for long. The cow lay on her side, half embedded in snow and ice, which in places was piled two feet deep on the platform.

The sheep and the goats were, of course, dead also, the latter perfectly covered in a mass of frozen snow. Thinking I heard a faint noise near one of the small cannon at the corner of the platform, I made my way over there, and discovered that a hole had been scratched in a truss of hay I had provided. Proceeding in my investigation, I took off one of my gloves, and inserting my arm drew forth a rabbit and two pigeons, the former of which had instinctively burrowed for warmth, and so all three were saved from the fate of the larger animals. Placing the little creatures beneath the ample folds of my fur cloak, I now resolved to return to the shelter of the house, for I began to feel the cold dreadfully, and besides was panting most painfully from even this slight exertion. Slipping suddenly as I made my way round, I placed my hand on the breech of one of the cannon to recover myself. With a scream of pain I withdrew my hand. What was this new marvel? The gun metal felt as if redhot, and a blister rising at once on the palm seemed to confirm this idea.

I did not at the moment recollect that this is an effect always produced on touching good conductors, such as metals, when exposed to intense cold.

I suppose I had now been exposed to this fearfully low temperature for about five minutes. I am afraid to guess how much below zero, and had no means of telling, for both the mercury in one thermometer and the spirit in the other had frozen hard, during which time my attention had been so taken up with the marvellous prospect that I had bestowed but little thought on my own sensations. But now each moment these grew more painful—my breath more laborious, coming in fitful gasps, and the sense of giddiness and faintness more oppressive.

I soon noticed that as the breath issued from me the vapour was instantly frozen, and fell to the floor in sparkling drops of ice. This will give some idea of the fearful cold; but yet, as if I had not proof sufficient that no mortal could withstand it for even a few minutes and live, I experienced a new and almost incredible effect, which I suppose the warmth of my body had hitherto staved off.

Just as I reached the door of the house, and when about to enter, I paused to take one last lingering look. I had felt for some time a stiffness and soreness of the eyes, but had not paid any particular attention thereto: increasing dimness of sight caused me to attempt to close my eyes for a moment; imagine, then, my astonishment when I found I could not do so. Both eyes were frozen wide open! The watery fluid which serves to lubricate the eyeball, in order that the eyelid may freely move thereon, had been converted into ice, through a thin film of which I had been looking for the last minute or so, its increasing thickness causing the dimness I had noticed.

So soon as I discovered this alarming fact, I staggered into the house, and fell exhausted on the floor.

“Close the door, Ramoon!” I cried; “quick! then

light the fire. M. Girardin, pull the string of the great valve. We shall surely all perish from cold."

There I lay, utterly helpless, and watched and waited in an agony of expectation for the fire in the stove which should warm the blood I already fancied must be freezing in my veins.

It was excessively dangerous to light the fire in the stove while the gas was escaping; but no thought of that or any thing else could have deterred me, for now I began to feel the pain and misery of being frozen to death.

The temperature of the house itself was now almost as bitterly cold as that of the air outside; and soon there crept upon me a drowsy feeling, the invariable precursor of death from cold, and I felt myself sinking into slumber—a slumber which, if not disturbed, would surely end in the last long sleep of death. I knew this well, but nevertheless resigned myself calmly to my fate—glad rather than otherwise to meet Death himself at the price of immunity from pain; and then all was blank, and again I sank into insensibility.

CHAPTER XVII.

WE ARE BORNE BY THE WIND OVER VAST FORESTS AND
PRAIRIES.

As I sank into unconsciousness, my feelings were rather pleasurable than otherwise; but coming to again was a very different thing. At first the sensation was one of uneasiness only; this was succeeded by a painful tingling in every part of my body, followed by extreme agony. Every limb was racked with pain. A heavy load appeared to rest on my chest; while each effort to breathe felt like the stab of a knife.

How I longed for death—for that calm oblivion

from which I was so painfully and unwillingly awakening!

Gradually, however, this extreme suffering moderated, and, as I regained my senses, I was conscious of a general feeling of soreness and dull pain all over. Presently I opened my eyes, but only a very little, for they were very sore and swelled up all round, as though I had been engaged in a pugilistic encounter. I soon found the same to be the case with all my limbs, which were swollen in a similar manner. Collecting my thoughts, I soon remembered all that had occurred, and attributed this swelling of my limbs to the intense cold. However, I found to my joy that I was able to move, and even to rise, though not without pain. The house was empty, and the door wide open, through which streamed the bright warm sunshine. I made my way out as well as I could, and found Ramoon and M. Girardin gazing over the rail at the view below.

"Ah, gubnor, dat you? Ba Jumbo, how you head swell?" was the greeting of the former; "t'ought you gone to Daby Jones dat time. How you feel?"

"Better now, but very sore," I replied, and proceeded to the rail in order to look out.

I found that we had descended to within half a mile of the ocean, nothing else but which was visible. The sun was shining in all his midday glory; below, the deep blue sea; above, the azure vault of heaven. It was a glorious tropical day; and as it was spring, and the sun near the zenith, I knew we could not be any great distance from the equator.

I proceeded to question M. Girardin, who informed me that, after I lapsed into insensibility, he kept the large valve open, in order to get rid of gas and descend, confident that otherwise we must soon perish, notwithstanding even the warmth of the stove. It was fortunate indeed for me that I had for a companion so experienced an aeronaut as the little Frenchman; had it not been for his knowledge and address, we must either have perished above the clouds, or, from

an over escape of gas, have fallen headlong to earth. Of course Ramoon could not be of the slightest use, unless directed and told what to do. So far from realising the manifold dangers we had encountered, more especially the narrow escape I had had from death on two occasions, he thought it all a capital joke.

Girardin told me, that finding I continued insensible, he kept a careful look-out through the glass plates, and finding we were descending with great rapidity, closed the valve and threw out ballast, intending, if possible, to remain nearly stationary till daylight. He soon discovered from the rapid melting of the ice—not being able to see the thermometer—that we were now in a comparatively warm stratum, and at the first dawn opened the door and went out. He found, he said, on consulting the barometer, that we were floating at a height of about a mile, or rather more; but whether land or water lay beneath he could not tell, on account of a dense mist, which hid every thing. This gradually melted away on the rising of the sun, and he saw a vast expanse of ocean about a mile below, but no sign whatever of land. He then caused the balloon to descend yet lower, and even at one time was within a few hundred yards of the surface. He and Ramoon were on the watch for land or vessels, in order to form some idea of our situation, when I staggered out from the platform-house—a most pitiable-looking object, as he told me.

It was nearly a dead calm, and as I felt faint and exhausted, I took his advice, and returning to the house, wrapped myself in some warm furs, leaving him and Ramoon to navigate the balloon.

I was soon in a sweet, peaceful sleep, and dreaming of the happy days of my childhood in the far-off past.

I awoke much refreshed, and relieved in a great measure of the pains which had racked my limbs. The swelling, too, had gone down, and I was in a fair way for a rapid recovery.

Night was again closing in, and feeling so much

better, I desired Girardin and Ramoon to take a sleep for some hours, knowing that they must be sadly in want of rest. The good-hearted Frenchman would with difficulty consent, declaring that I was yet too ill, and that he would see to the balloon till daylight. But I insisted, and finally he consented to lie down till midnight, when he made me expressly promise to call him, in order that he might take the watch for the remainder of the night.

Poor Girardin ! Never shall I forget his kindness, self-devotion, utter unselfishness, and quiet courage ! From dusk till midnight we floated serenely on, about half a mile above the sea, which lay as though asleep, rarely ruffled by a breath of air. Occasionally, as we descended too low, I threw out a little sand, and then we gently rose again. My watch passed thus. Silence and solitude reigned around. Imagine, reader, the still solemnity of the situation—floating over a smooth, glassy sea, suspended, as it were, motionless in space.

But towards midnight I observed the sea rippled by a slight breeze, which, nowever, blew only in cat's-paws.

I called Girardin, who cheerfully arose, insisted on my taking the couch he had spread on the floor, and then went out to take the balloon watch.

I soon sank to sleep again—nor woke till the sun was high in the heavens, for the Frenchman had chosen to watch the whole time himself rather than call me. We were still floating at an altitude of about a mile above the ocean ; the sky was nearly cloudless, and the dead calm of the previous day and night had been succeeded by a strong breeze, which a glance at the curly crests of the waves below told me blew from the west. Scanning the horizon by my eye west, north, south, nothing could be seen but sea ; far away to the east, however, I discerned a dark line, which Girardin was examining through a telescope ; this I at once conjectured to be land, and a look through the glass confirmed the idea. The pain and swelling of the limbs

had almost entirely left me, and, beginning to feel hungry, I retired within the house, closed the door, and set to work to prepare breakfast for myself and companions.

Having taken all necessary precautions for safety, I lighted the fire in the stove, and soon had ready a meal of coffee, biscuits, and hung beef; then, having extinguished the fire, I went out and informed them with mock politeness that breakfast was on the table: although I myself ate sparingly, Ramoon and the Frenehman did ample justice to my culinary skill, for the pure keen air of the higher regions had served to whet their appetites.

Having finished first, I went out, and a cry of astonishment which escaped me soon brought out the other two.

We had now descended some half-mile lower, and from the great distance we had traversed in so short a time, the wind must have been blowing with great force; for, in place of the ocean, the land which we had seen a short time previously as a dark line on the horizon was now beneath us.

The country was covered with dense forests, interspersed here and there with great patches of savannah and prairies. My powerful glass enabled me to examine the nature of the land beneath. I could discover no clearings, or signs of human habitations; and from this, and the luxuriant and tropical nature of the foliage, concluded that we were passing over some portion of Central America. We now began to ascend again, as I had thrown out some ballast. The scene was fine in the extreme. Far as the eye could reach stretched the vast forests, of brownish green colour. The patches of bright yellow prairie offered a fine contrast, and greatly enhanced the effect. Both prairie and forest had probably never been visited by other human beings than wild Indians; or, perchance, hunters in the pursuit of game.

CHAPTER XVIII.

CATCHING A BUFFALO.

PRESENTLY I perceived, in one of these prairies, a black patch moving rapidly in a northerly direction. Examining this with my telescope, I discovered it to be a herd of buffaloes tearing at a gallop through the long grass.

But what are those objects moving in their rear? Stray buffaloes from the herd? No! they are mounted men—Texan hunters—in the pursuit of the wild animals. At least, so I conjectured; and, wishing to satisfy myself, pulled the valve wide open in order to descend, and, if possible, speak to them.

We came down rapidly enough; but so strong was the wind, which I now perceived by the waving of the grass blew from the north-west, that before we could reach the ground we had passed them nearly a mile. We still continued to descend very fast, and as we were now not more than a quarter of a mile high I found it necessary to throw out more sand. This checked our descent; but so near to us was the earth, that the basket of the parachute had at one time actually grazed the prairie-grass. At the pace at which we were going that was too close to be pleasant, so, throwing out a hundred-pound bag of sand, the balloon once more shot up into the air. We continued our course for some few hours at the height of about half a mile; I, on the northern side of the platform, keeping a bright look-out for signs of clearings or human habitations, the Frenchman and Ramoon doing the same on the other. Presently I saw another black patch moving over the prairie. A sudden thought struck me.

“A capital idea!” I cried. “Girardin, Ramoon, we’ll have a shot at these fellows. Pull the valve-string, one of you.”

[then loaded three of my rifles, and having given

one each to my companions, looked towards the herd, which, coming up from a southerly direction, would, if they kept on their course, pass immediately beneath us.

Suddenly Ramoon cried, "I say, gub'nor, the cow's dead—let's catch a bufaler!"

"Catch a buffalo?" I said. "How do you mean?"

"Why, wid the big fish-hook, ob course!" he said, pointing to one of the grapnels.

I burst out laughing at the idea; but, absurd as it seemed, I resolved to attempt it. If I could succeed in throwing the grapnel among the herd, closely packed as they were, it was extremely probable it would lay hold of one.

But, it may be said, the balloon would not lift the sudden extra weight added. True; but, as Ramoon remarked, the cow was dead, and, by throwing over the carcass the moment we hooked one, with fifty pounds or so ballast, we should lift the animal from the ground, and, perhaps, succeed in getting it into the car. All went well for the success of the adventure. The balloon descended steadily; and the herd, not seeing us, swept on.

I noticed other mounted horsemen in pursuit. These were not white men, but Indians, as I could tell by their brown skins and trappings. We were now about 150 yards from the ground, and nearly right over the herd.

"Ramoon and Girardin," I said, "stand by the cow, and, when I give the word, shove her over the edge."

I stood with the rope coiled by my side, all clear for running, and holding the grapnel in my hands. When I thought the proper time had come I threw it out. The aim was good, for it fell very near the centre of the herd. There was a wild plunging and scattering, then a tremendous jerk, and I knew it had taken hold.

"Heave!" I shouted; and the next moment the carcass of the cow fell to earth, knocking down and

killing one of the buffaloes. The same moment the buoyant power of the balloon exerted its force, and the rope strained as taut as an iron bar; but the animal was entangled amongst the herd, plunging and struggling tremendously. All the others set up a terrific bellowing whilst this singular struggle was going on.

Pull, good balloon! pull, buffalo! Now we have him! No, no! with a frantic plunge he gets his head beneath the belly of another, still struggling, kicking, and bellowing tremendously.

It was a grand bit of fun. Ramoon danced, laughed, and yelled, in the greatest degree of excitement.

"Two to one on the barloom!" he shouted. "The bufaler he got no chance! he bound to come!"

"Out with another bag of ballast!" I shouted.

This settled the matter, and turned the scale in our favour. Slowly, steadily his head was dragged from beneath the fore-legs of the one next him. Gradually, foot by foot, his head and shoulders appeared above the herd, till, amid the frantic, triumphant cries of Ramoon, and the bellowings of the herd, the captured buffalo is hoisted, kicking and plunging, high into the air. Then, borne by the breeze, away we sailed with our prize.

Having caught our buffalo, the next consideration was what to do with him. Leaving him hanging there was out of the question, as, in the first place, the animal was alive, and to allow him to die a lingering death was revolting to humanity; then Girardin reminded me that, as the buffalo hung, it would be impossible to descend to his parachute without coming into collision, which, of course, would be fatal; so I resolved to hoist him up, and get him on the platform. This was no easy task, for the weight was great; but, resolved to succeed, I made two tackles with ropes and blocks. Now, the grapnel was attached to the same hook as the parachute, which hook was in turn secured to two guys leading from strong bolts in the platform, down on each side of the boat. By referring to the

drawing of the car and balloon, it will be seen at once that the grapnel-rope holding the buffalo must hang close to the rope and ladder leading to the parachute. So, taking one end of the tackle with me, I descended about half-way down the ladder, and bent it on to the grapnel-rope; then I came up again, and fixing the tackle-rope to the winch, we proceeded, with little difficulty, to hoist the animal half-way up. I then again went down, and fixed the tackle as close as possible to the brute's body.

He kicked, and bellowed, and roared in the most frantic manner, causing the car to sway about dangerously. Nevertheless, I succeeded in fixing the end of the fall, and this time we hauled him within a few feet of the boat. I then cut several broad, strong bands of canvas, and, fixing ropes thereto, succeeded in getting them under his body in several places. I brought the ends of all these ropes together, and affixed them to another tackle, which I fastened to one of the strong guys of the balloon, which were attached to the network; then, without much more difficulty, we managed to get him to the end of the platform, and hauled him in.

He lay quite still for some time, which gave me an opportunity for removing the canvas bands and grapnel, which had considerably lacerated his fore-quarters and breast. I thought he was dead for some time, but he quickly and suddenly undeceived us on that point; for, starting to his feet with a loud bellow, he rushed at Ramoon, who was the nearest. The Cingalese escaped by taking to the cordage, and the buffalo then turned upon me. However, I dodged him by running round and round the house, which I could easily do, as he had more difficulty in turning the corners. Presently, getting tired of the rough treatment, through violent exertion and loss of blood, he fell, first on his knees, and then at full length. The poor brute's fury was probably caused by terror, for, seeing he was panting, and his tongue hanging out from thirst, I filled him a pailful of water, and pushed it towards him, taking care

to keep out of the reach of his horns. He seemed now quite quiet and subdued, and, approaching behind him cautiously, I threw a noose of strong cord over his horns, drew it tight, and fastened the ends to one of the guys, thus securing ourselves from any danger of attack; then, throwing him a bundle of hay, I left him to his own devices.

Looking out to the south-west, I could now again discern the ocean; and, much to my surprise, on looking in that direction, I also saw sea to the south-east. At first I could not understand that, but gradually the truth dawned upon me. We were floating above Central America, approaching the Isthmus of Panama, and were in sight, at the same time, of both the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans.

"My friends," said the Frenchman, "I must leave you now. I must make my descent while yet we are over the land. In a short time you will be blown out to sea."

A glance convinced me that this was a fact. We were drifting with great speed in a south-easterly direction, and, in half an hour, at most, would have again the ocean beneath us.

"I will now go down in my parachute," said Monsieur Girardin; "will you oblige me by causing the balloon to ascend till it about reaches two miles? When I am ready I will inform you—bid you adieu—liberate the parachute—descend in safety—prove the truth of my theory—and make my name immortal."

Then he shook me by the hand, and ran nimbly down the ladder. I threw out a bag of ballast, and we quickly shot up to the desired elevation.

"Now, my friend," shouted the Frenchman, from his seat in the basket; "prepare yourself for the sudden loss in weight of myself and parachute. It will probably cause the balloon to oscillate and shoot upward with tremendous velocity. Place the breathing tubes connected with the air-bags to your mouths, for the gas

will escape in large volumes from the lower valves; pull all the valve-strings, and lie down, holding on by some secure rope."

I did as he said, directing Ramoon to follow my example.

I lay with my head just over the edge of the platform.

"Are you ready?" shouted Girardin.

"Ready, all!"

"Adieu! God speed you!"

"Good by, and good luck to you! May we meet again!" I replied.

Then I felt a jerk at the liberating iron, and saw the parachute plunge downwards.

CHAPTER XIX.

A TERRIBLE DISASTER.

ALMOST instantly after the liberation of the parachute the ear of the balloon swung violently to and fro, till at one moment it was in an almost horizontal position. Then, in the space of a second, a small barrel of water broke from its lashings, and rolled over the edge, as did several small articles—and almost simultaneously a tremendous rocking and heaving told me that some other catastrophe had occurred.

I was still lying face downwards, and gazing over the edge of the platform. Imagine my dismay when I saw several dark objects beneath me, falling towards the parachute—and, turning over and over in the air, the buffalo, which had been thrown over by the violent oscillation. About half a mile beneath me I could see the parachute, which descended beautifully, though with fearful speed. As the air offered more and more resistance to its extended surface, it commenced to swing and gyrate about, apparently describing a spiral in its descent. I thought it would

reach the ground in safety, and felt relieved from an intense momentary fear ; but, at that moment, one of the small objects that had fallen from the platform struck it on the edge, causing it to heel over. It again resumed its horizontal position, and, I hoped, was safe ; but, the next moment, the carcass of the buffalo, which was falling with tremendous velocity, struck it near the centre.

All was over ! I had a momentary vision of a confused mass, tumbling over and over in space. I saw the body of the unfortunate Frenchman precipitated from the basket ; then the whole went plunging downwards, and disappeared in a stratum of cloud.

All this passed so rapidly that I had been unable to pay much attention to the wild motions of the balloon, and my own sensations ; each moment the effect increased, and was almost beyond description. The immense machine which suspended us between "heaven and earth," whilst it appeared to be forced upwards with terrific violence and rapidity through unknown and untravelled regions, amidst the howlings of a fearful hurricane, rolled about as though revelling in a freedom it had long struggled for, but of which until that moment it had been kept in absolute ignorance. It at length, as if somewhat fatigued by its exertions, gradually assumed the motions of a snake working its way with astonishing rapidity towards a given object.

During this frightful operation the gas was rushing in torrents from the upper and lower valves ; but more particularly from the latter, as if the density of the atmosphere through which we were forcing our progress pressed so heavily on the valve at the top of the balloon as to admit of comparatively but a small escape from that aperture.

At this juncture, had it not been for the application to our mouths of the two pipes leading into an air-bag with which we had furnished ourselves previously to starting, we must within a minute have been

suffocated ; and so, though by different means, have shared the melancholy fate of our unfortunate friend.

This bag was formed of silk ; sufficiently capacious to contain 300 gallons of atmospheric air. Prior to our ascent the bag was inflated, with the assistance of a pair of bellows, with 150 gallons of air, so allowing for any expansion that might be produced in the upper regions. Into one end of the bag were introduced two flexible tubes ; and the moment we felt ourselves going up in the manner just described, Ramoon as well as myself placed one of them in our mouths.

By this contrivance we preserved ourselves from instantaneous suffocation : a result which must have ensued from the apparently endless volume of gas in which the car was enveloped. The gas, notwithstanding all our precautions, from the violence of its operation on the human frame, almost immediately deprived us of sight, and we were both, as far as our visionary powers were concerned, in a state of total darkness for a space of four or five minutes.

As soon as we had partially regained the use of our eyes, and had somewhat recovered from the effects of the awful scene into which, from the circumstances, we had been plunged, our first attention was directed to the barometer. I discovered that it stood at 13·20, giving an elevation of 28,384 feet, or about five miles and a quarter.

I do not conceive, from the length of time I had been liberating the gas, that this was any thing like our greatest altitude ; for we were evidently effecting a rapid descent. This impression is corroborated by a rough calculation, which leads me to believe, knowing the customary rate at which gas makes its escape, taken into consideration with the length of time that I had been pulling the valve-line, that we had lost at least 30,000 feet, or 180,000 gallons of gas.

It may be regarded as somewhat surprising that

not a larger quantity had evaporated, especially when the size of the valves is considered ; that at the top being nearly three feet in diameter, whilst the one at the neck of the balloon was upwards of two feet. The reason, however, is easily pointed out. The extreme rapidity with which we ascended, coupled with the consequent pressure of the atmosphere on the upper part of the balloon, necessarily prevented much escape from the top valve. The same cause also forced an extraordinary emission from the valve at the neck, and I am decidedly of opinion that had it not fortuitously happened that this valve was 40 inches in diameter, the balloon must have burst, and my companion as well as myself have been hurled headlong into eternity.

Finding ourselves suffering severely from cold, we referred to the thermometer, which stood at 18° ,— 14° below freezing point.

We were, at this period, apparently about two miles and a half above a dense mountain of cloud, which presented the appearance of impenetrable masses of dark marble, whilst all around us were shed the brilliant rays of the setting sun. We continued to descend with great rapidity ; but, as we approached the clouds, that velocity considerably increased.

I again pulled the valve-string, in order to descend yet faster, determined to ascertain the fate of my poor friend : although, of course, I felt convinced he must have been dashed to pieces. To hasten our descent, I set Ramoon pumping at the compressed air-chest, in order to increase our weight, if only by a few pounds. We now descended with great rapidity, and soon passed into the stratum of clouds in which the parachute had disappeared.

When we emerged from these, I discovered a wooded country beneath us, but to the eastward, and alarmingly near, was the ocean. Not knowing in which direction we were drifting, and fearing to fall into the sea, I stopped the escape of gas, and threw

out some bags of ballast, in order to check our descent. It was well I did so ; for, notwithstanding this, we still fell with alarming rapidity, and as at the same time it was certain we were drifting with a strong westerly wind, the ocean was soon beneath us, and the foam and agitation of the waves on its surface convinced me that a gale was blowing, which, of course, would preclude the possibility of our getting back over the land, and ascertaining the fate of the parachute and its intrepid but unfortunate inventor. Indeed, from the pace at which we were swept along by the wind, I felt certain that the spot where he fell must be many miles to the westward.

We were now within half a mile of the sea, and falling rapidly ; so I threw out four hundredweight of ballast, which checked our descent gradually, but not a whit too soon, as we did not finally hang suspended till the water was only about a hundred yards beneath us. I could plainly hear the roar of the waves and the sighing of the wind as it swept on.

And yet, to us in the balloon, there was a perfect calm. It was a very strange sensation, this absolute stillness of the air, while beneath us the waves were lashed into fury by the violence of the storm.

The scene, as night closed around us, was grand in the extreme. The whole surface of the sea shone with brilliant phosphorescence from the agitation of its surface, while its low, continuous roar broke like distant thunder on our ears.

With a feeling of loneliness and awe which I had never yet experienced, I threw out more ballast, and we slowly ascended.

On—on—still we swept, with the dark vault of heaven above us, spangled with stars ; belted with white fleecy strata of clouds in places. Around us, as it were, infinite space : below, the trackless ocean.

And so we entered on another night in the clouds. But now there were but two of us, and on me, at least, the memory of the terrible fate of my poor

friend Girardin weighed heavily, and caused a feeling of misery and despondency I had never before experienced.

The air was warm and balmy at the elevation we had now attained, so I allowed a little gas to escape. Then, having ascertained that we floated in mid-air without ascending or falling to any appreciable degree, I proceeded to a careful examination of the balloon, in order to see if it had sustained any damage from the terrible ordeal through which it had passed. I found a rent of about a foot, near the lower valve, which, having plenty of spare silk and every appliance, I had little difficulty in stitching up. Then, having completed my examination, I descended, and, with a heavy heart, commenced to put things straight about the platform and in the house. Nearly all the loose articles had been swept over by the violent oscillations of the balloon, and much of my apparatus had been broken and disarranged. But my most serious loss was two small kegs of water, which had broken adrift and fallen over, first, however, by ill-luck, staving in my large cask, which was lashed to the side of the house. Every drop of water had escaped from this, so that all I had now remaining was two kegs, each containing about five gallons, and a small barrel lashed to the house.

When I had done all I could to repair damages, and, so far as possible, make safe for the future, I sat me down, and, leaning my head on my hands, gave way to a fit of despondent thought.

Where was I? I could only answer, "Floating in the air!"

Whither was the balloon drifting?

I did not know, except that I was clearly floating above a vast expanse of ocean.

What would be my fate, and that of poor, faithful Ramoon?

Were we doomed to perish of hunger and cold, or heat and thirst? or should we shortly share the **fate**

of Girardin, and, as if in punishment for our presumption, be hurled headlong to earth, or rather, to ocean?

Once or twice I bethought me of the lifeboat; and the idea crossed my mind of causing the balloon to descend, lowering the boat into the sea, and then, having thrown in a keg of water and some provisions, leaving the treacherous element, air, and trusting to the water, which was, at least, more stable.

I cast my eyes downwards, and recoiled at the thought; for, though now nearly a mile high, I could see that a terrible tempest raged, lashing the sea into fury, and covering the whole expanse beneath with a mantle of foam.

How strange it seemed, to listen to the dull roar of the waves below, the hoarse shrieking of the wind; to watch the tempest-tossed sea as the Storm King swept on; and yet to float on as quietly as, and apparently with no more motion than, if it were a dead calm! This, of course, on consideration, was not wonderful, but easily accounted for; as, the balloon being of the same specific gravity as the air in which it floated, drifted with it in whatever direction it blew. Still it was difficult to realise that fact.

Drifting out to sea—away from all human ken: Drifting away, across the bosom of the trackless ocean, at the absolute mercy of the fickle winds! To be blown hither and thither as rude Boreas might choose! Drifting away, helpless, powerless as a feather floating in the rapids above Niagara!

The thoughts which our helpless condition gave rise to were humiliating in the extreme. Where was now my boasted skill, my intrepidity, my perseverance? Where now my high hopes, my ambitious dreams of reaching the glorious land I had before visited? That, I conjectured, lay far away to the west, while we were drifting eastward with the speed of the wind.

As I thus thought, a gleam of light in the western sky attracted my attention. I looked round, and be-

held a beautiful meteor shooting across the heavens. It seemed to span the firmament from west to east, rising to the zenith, and then sinking to within a few degrees of the opposite horizon. Long after it vanished, it left a brilliant train of light where its track had been. Slowly this bright girdle faded away,—first in the east, then overhead, till there remained only a brilliant streak near the western horizon.

This white streak, to my great surprise, seemed to shape itself into a huge finger, pointing to the east. I gazed on it till it disappeared.

“I accept the omen,” I cried involuntarily. “To the east be it, since fate seems so to will it! Away all desponding terrors and gloomy forebodings! Fortune, which has brought me through so many perils, will not now desert me. Fresh wonders, fresh discoveries, await my astonished gaze in far-off lands! Sail on, my aerial ship! Blow, winds, and waft me to new fields of adventure! Ill fortune, I defy you! ‘Richard is himself again!’”

I concluded my apostrophe in this melodramatic manner, and, starting to my feet, cried:

“Come, my copper friend, cheer up! ‘Awake, arise, or be for ever fallen!’”

Ramoon, who was not familiar with Milton, seemed astonished at my enthusiasm, and, taking my words literally, said:

“No, tankee, massa. Me no fall, please, if all de same to you. You is a good tumbler. Dis chile don’t care about tumble in de sea.”

“Bah! nonsense! Who is going to fall? Come; suppose we have some supper.”

I then proceeded to cut some dried beef, which, with biscuit and water dashed with grog, made our frugal meal.

Shortly afterwards, leaving Ramoon on the watch, with strict instructions to call me in five hours’ time, which would be shortly before dawn, or sooner, should any thing occur, I wrapped myself up, and lay down

to sleep. And so passed my first night in the clouds after the disaster to poor Girardin.

CHAPTER XX.

I REACH THE BELT OF PERPETUAL CALMS ABOUT THE EQUATOR.

FIRST DAY.—When I awoke, the gray tints of dawn were just beginning to appear in the east. The morning was chilly, and a heavy dew falling from the cloudless sky had completely saturated the balloon, and every object on the car. It was very chilly; so, wrapping myself up warmly, I took a seat on a barrel, and watched the dawning of day.

It was a grand and solemn sight. A silence as of the tomb reigned around. Above was the vault of heaven, studded with stars, whose light was now growing paler in the east, from the approach of the bright orb of day to the horizon. Slowly they faded away, one by one; first the smaller, then the larger and brighter, till a gray tint pervaded the whole sky, and the twinkling diamonds of the night retired abashed before the rosy dawn.

Beneath me, at a distance of about half a mile, lay the ocean, calm and sullen; its surface now unruffled by foam, though a heavy rolling sea bore witness to the violence of yesterday's gale.

Slowly the gray light in the east deepened,—red tints began to appear on the clouds fringing the horizon. These grew ruddier and lighter, till all the eastern sky seemed glowing like a furnace.

Then some clouds above our heads became glittering and shining with silver light, as the rays of the sun fell on them. The red hues faded away, yielding to a golden yellow glow; and slowly the bright luminary heaved himself up from the sea, to give light to the world.

We were floating steadily on in a south-easterly direction, and, as I judged by noting the progress of the balloon's shadow on the sea, at the rate of some twenty miles an hour. This would carry us nearly 500 miles a day, and at that rate we should soon reach the equator, if, indeed, the direction of the wind did not change.

The day passed without any occurrence worthy of narration. So quiet and imperceptible was our motion, that I could with difficulty persuade myself we were moving rapidly; but a glance at the ocean beneath soon reminded me of the fact. A patch of sea-weed immediately beneath us was, in a very few minutes, far away—an almost invisible spot—to the north-west.

Thus passed our first day, and night again threw her mantle over us. So soon as the stars were visible, I took an observation of the pole-star, which was now perceptible, near the northern horizon. As we approached the equator, I knew it would entirely disappear.

I found the altitude of this star to be about 20 degrees; and, as the latitude always corresponds nearly with this altitude, I knew that we had entered the tropical zone.

Another night of calm solitude; the stars of heaven, those sleepless sentinels, our only companions.

Second Day.—The day broke as before—gloriously bright and beautiful. From the gradual escape of gas, the balloon slowly descended, and we now drifted along at a height of about 200 yards only from the sea. Occasionally I observed a few birds, boobies and gannets; but these, with the exception of the flying-fish and bonettas, which were very plentiful, were the only signs of life to be discovered in the ocean or in the air.

The wind now veered round, and blew from the north, so that we were being carried directly towards the equator.

The heat rapidly grew greater; and the gas in the

balloon expanding from that cause, it once again filled out, and assumed its original rotund state, notwithstanding the large quantity of gas we had lost.

Although there was a stiff breeze blowing, we felt none of the effects of it as we were borne along, and the heat began to get quite oppressive. In order to obviate this as much as possible, I rigged an awning over the house and platform. Of course, had I so chosen, I could have got any amount of coldness by ascending to the higher regions; but this was not my wish, as I preferred to keep near the surface of the sea. I employed the afternoon and evening in clearing away, and examining the lifeboat; for it was highly probable we should ultimately be forced to abandon the balloon and take to it.

Hitherto we had not seen a single sail; nor, on consideration, did I wonder thereat, for we were not near the track of either outward or homeward bound ships.

I now seriously began to contemplate our position and prospects. I had ascertained that we were being swept by the current of air rapidly to the south; but I knew that a time would soon come when our course would be arrested; that we should reach the region of perpetual calms, tremendous rain showers, water-spouts, and light, baffling winds. This region, comprising some five degrees on either side of the equator, is called by sailors the Doldrums. What would be our fate when we reached this? Should we be continually drifted backward and forward about the Line by the light, baffling airs which there prevail, until, our water and provisions being all expended, we should be compelled to take to our boat, and trust to our oars to clear us from these latitudes of eternal calm?

It seemed very probable; and it was with feelings of great disquietude that I looked forward to the prospect. Night again came; and, after throwing out a little ballast, in order that the balloon might ascend to a safe elevation, I, worn out by fatigue and anxiety, fell into a

deep sleep, and did not awaken therefrom till the dawn was breaking of the

Third Day.—Towards noon I noticed some heavy, dark clouds to the south-east, which, from their appearance, betokened rain. We were still being drifted to the southward; but the breeze was obviously falling, and I knew we were approaching very near to the belt of calms and rains.

Now I began to wonder what would be the effects of heavy rain on the balloon. Would the wet absolutely destroy the varnish in time, or would it have but little effect? Although I gave the subject deep thought, I was unable to come to a conclusion. One thing was certain; and that was, that the moisture would cause the gas to condense greatly, and it cautioned me to be prepared for the event.

Night again came, and still found us drifting slowly to the south, the breeze gradually dying away; till, shortly after midnight, I could tell, by examining the surface of the sea, that it was nearly a dead calm. The pole-star was now all but invisible, being only a few degrees above the horizon, while new constellations appeared in the south.

The *fourth day* came, and with it a sweltering heat almost insupportable. Much of the varnish of the balloon melted, and fell in drops on the awning over our heads. The pitch in the seams of the lifeboat also melted; while the gas in the balloon expanded so much as to threaten destruction to its envelope.

Slowly the breeze faded away, till, by noon, there reigned a perfect calm. The surface of the sea was smooth as glass; while all around the horizon dark rain squalls gathered, threatening a deluge ere long. Occasionally, in patches, the sea would be just rippled by cat's-paws; but these trifling airs soon died away again.

Night came, and was followed by another day, the **very** counterpart of the last. I found that, despite the almost perfect calm, we were gradually drifting

to the southward, till, about the sixth day, all motion ceased, and we hung suspended in space over a wide expanse of sea. Calm, unrippled, glassy old Ocean seemed to have sunk into slumber: all nature participated in the deep repose.

The vertical sun blazed down upon us, heating the car and house till both were almost insupportable, parching our throats with a burning thirst, and actually blistering our skins when we exposed ourselves.

I never remember a heat so dreadful, so oppressive. The air was heated as though it came from an oven, and each breath seemed to increase the fever that burnt in my veins.

And now there arose another and terrible source of alarm. Our thirst being stimulated by the great heat, we had consumed daily large quantities of water. Having emptied the small barrel in the house, I determined to tap the cask on the platform, which held 150 gallons. Imagine my dismay when I discovered that it was empty. One of the staves had been stove in, loosened, and the whole of the contents had leaked away.

I found on examination that every drop of water we had amounted only to four gallons: allowing a little for evaporation and waste, this would leave thirty pints. Thus, by restricting ourselves to a pint a day each, we had only sufficient for fifteen days.

A pint of water a day! Those only who have suffered the horrors of thirst beneath a scorching sun can know how terrible a thing it is to be restricted to such a quantity; on less, life could not be supported. But after the expiration of that time, what a prospect was before us! Death, in its most horrible shape—the slow agonies of death by thirst—till the blood, drying up in our veins, should leave us scorched and withered mummies.

Those only who have themselves suffered from a scarcity of water can imagine the horrible appearance people experiencing intense thirst present. The tongue swollen, dry, and cracked, protruding from the mouth;

the lips bloated and livid; the skin hard and rough; the very liquor which moistens the eyeball dried up; perspiration and all the excretions utterly stopped—the whole making up a picture daily, hourly more dreadful, the agonies more intense, till death mercifully steps in and closes the sad scene.

I had seen something of this, and read much more, and shuddered at the thought.

Then an idea struck me—a gleam of hope shot across my mind. The rain! for were we not in the regions of heavy tropical showers and calms?

But on consideration another source of danger loomed in the future. It had been my hope to have been wafted out of this narrow belt of variable winds and calms; but should such be the case, we must leave behind us our only hope of water.

This, then, was my dilemma: to remain was death by starvation or drowning, for, lighten the car as we would, the balloon could not float for ever, on account of the constant leakage of gas; to go was to perish from thirst—truly, a terrible predicament!

Again and again I thought and strove to find some way out of the difficulty; but the most hopeful prospect in view was, that I might be able to collect a quantity of rain water. But then, again, how would these heavy tropical showers affect the balloon? and how much could we collect daily above our consumption?

I could not answer these questions; and when night closed in upon us, I was still in a state of perplexity and the deepest anxiety. Hitherto we had had no rain.

Seventh Day.—Again the sun rose, and mounted the heavens, hot and scorching. The bosom of the ocean was scarcely rippled by the faintest zephyr, though I fancied we were slowly, very slowly, drifting to the northward. In vain I scanned the horizon for a sail, for land. We were hundreds of miles from the tracks of vessels—hundreds of leagues from land.

At noon our thirst began to be unbearable. Ramoon begged eagerly for water; so I gave him half his allowance, enjoining him to be careful of it. Poor fellow! he thought not of the terrible prospect before him, swallowed it at a gulp, and asked for more. I, more prudently, sucked mine slowly through a piece of fine glass tubing,—part of my chemical apparatus,—suffering it to moisten my tongue and palate before swallowing. But this expedient could not keep the fiend Thirst at bay for long. By an hour after noon my pannikin was empty, and I craved for more. Ramoon's entreaties were piteous, and wrung my heart.

“Water, water! Gub me water, or I burn up!”

Pitying his misery, I resolved to let him have a portion of his remaining half-pint, even if I stinted myself. I poured about a gill into his pannikin, and directed him to suck it through a piece of tubing, as I had done. He followed my advice; and if it did not quench his thirst, it at least cooled and moistened his palate more effectually. Long before sundown I was compelled to commence my remaining half-pint, and give Ramoon the whole of his share. When he had finished his, he sat watching me sip mine with so wistful a gaze, that I could not refuse to share it with him. Night came, and with it, by good Providence, a plentiful dew. I took a piece of linen, and mopped up every drop of moisture I could find, till it was wet enough for me to squeeze some into my mouth. Then, when the burning thirst was somewhat alleviated, I continued collecting the dew and squeezing it into a pannikin. I, as well as Ramoon,—who, after the day's experience, saw the urgent necessity,—kept at this work till near four o'clock in the morning, when I felt it necessary to get some rest.

But with all our labour we had only collected a little over half a pint. Still, this quantity, in our condition, was a priceless boon. For the time, the demon Thirst was banished; for the cool air of night,

and the dew falling on our bodies, had in a measure satisfied the demands of nature.

Eighth Day.—When I awoke, the sun was high in the heavens. It was nearly nine o'clock. I believe it was the return of the thirst which waked me, as I felt it at once. I firmly resolved, at any cost, not to exceed the amount I had fixed on as our allowance—viz. one pint apiece. This, however, did not include the half-pint or rather more which we had collected the night before; so that, by sucking this slowly, we were enabled to do till noon without touching our regular supply.

Towards evening the burning fever returned as bad as ever; and it was with the utmost difficulty that I could restrain myself from taking one great draught, and finishing my pint at once. But no! my resolution remained unshaken, and at sundown I had still a little left, which I divided with Ramoon, who, poor fellow! had long previously finished his. All the afternoon I had been anxiously scanning the horizon, in the hope of discerning symptoms of rain; but, alas! was doomed to disappointment. Still, the hope of the cool dew of night kept up my spirits, and I looked forward to quenching my thirst, and securing at least another half-pint. Night came, but, alas! no welcome dew descended on us. The sky became clouded over head; and when this is the case, but little or no dew falls. In vain I waited and watched and prayed for the expected moisture. None came, and the night passed in feverish longings and vain hopes.

Ninth Day.—Another day—hot, scorching as before. But now, long before the sun rose, we were parched with thirst, and, moreover, were fevered and fatigued by want of sleep. I could not entirely master the desperate craving for water; and before noon my pint was all gone. Oh, the horrors of that afternoon! May I never experience them again! Often was I tempted to go to the keg which contained our little

stock, drink my fill, and take my chance for the future. But I conquered the desire, and, though suffering intensely, when night fell had not touched a drop over my pint—indeed, I had given the unfortunate Cingalese nearly a wineglassful of my little stock. The poor fellow was deeply grateful, and I believe did his utmost to repress and control his feelings.

Fortunately the night brought with it a slight dew—not to be compared to that of the first, but, in comparison to the second, a very heaven to our parched frames.

Tenth Day.—Still the same scorching heat and deadly calm. Sometimes the ocean would be gently fanned by a cat's-paw of wind; but it always died away again, leaving the surface smooth and glassy as a mirror, and, like it, reflecting the dazzling rays of the sun up to us. There were only a few light, fleecy clouds to be seen, and these, alas! betokened fine, hot weather, in place of the rains I hoped for. All this while I had reason to believe we were drifting in a northerly direction, at the rate of perhaps some ten miles a day. In the afternoon the heat grew intense, and our sufferings from thirst augmented in a like degree. Then it was that I remembered to have read that unfortunates who, like myself, had suffered these dreadful pangs had experienced much benefit from immersing the whole body in water. The thought struck me that there was nothing to prevent my doing so. During the last few days the balloon had been gradually settling down towards the sea, till now it floated at an elevation of only some two hundred feet. It would be an easy task to clear away and lower the boat, and then take a plunge-bath myself. Of course, I could at pleasure regain the boat, and either ascend by means of a rope-ladder, or be hauled up by my companion. I no sooner conceived the idea, than I resolved to put it in execution.

The task of clearing away and lowering the life-boat was neither a long nor a difficult one. She

struck the water with her stern first, as I had slung her mainly by the head. The splash of the light boat in the water fell welcome on my ears. It was, as it were, a link connecting air and earth—or rather, water. The balloon was floating at an elevation of not more than fifty feet, and, now that it was relieved of the boat's weight, showed a decided tendency to rise. Indeed, its buoyant power partly lifted the bow of the boat from the water; and I noticed at the same time that it was towing slowly through the water at a pace of perhaps a mile or a mile and a half an hour.

I wasted no time, but, intent on my projected bath, stripped to my canvas trousers, and, after hesitating one brief moment, plunged boldly over the edge of the platform. Being a good swimmer, and accustomed to take headers from considerable heights, I did not fail to jump head first on this occasion. One moment's quick rush through the air, and then I felt the splash and shock of the water. I went down a considerable distance, on account of the height from which I had leaped, which was greater than I had calculated. I struck out for the surface, which I reached somewhat out of breath. For a moment or so I paddled gently about, waiting till the salt water should run from my eyes and hair, and enable me to see. I was in no hurry—had no idea of danger; already I fancied my plunge-bath had modified the pangs of thirst. When I did open my eyes, I was well-nigh crying out with dismay. The balloon was full a quarter of a mile away, and, towing the boat after it, was rapidly increasing the distance. At once I realised my desperate peril. A light breeze had been slowly rising, and just as I leaped from the platform a sudden puff had wafted the balloon away. And now to my horror I perceived that the breeze was absolutely rising; the surface of the sea, which an hour ago had been smooth as glass, was now ruffled by the wind.

I struck out desperately in the direction of the boat and balloon; but, borne on the wings of the wind, the great air-bag sailed away, towing the boat behind, and seemed to mock my frantic efforts. In less than ten minutes balloon and boat were quite a mile away, and each moment the breeze rose and increased the distance. I glanced over my shoulder, and saw a great black squall sailing up from the wind's eye. In a few moments it was upon me, and amidst torrents of rain a hard wind swept over the ocean. For a time the rain and mist hid all from my sight, except the water a few yards around me.

The black squall swept on, and in the course of ten minutes or a quarter of an hour it had gone by. Then the wind began slowly to fall. I still kept on swimming manfully for dear life, and each time I rose on the crest of the waves which the squall had caused strained my eyes in the hope of discovering my aerial ship and boat. In vain. The black clouds and falling rain which had passed over obscured all ahead. A half-hour passed, and then the shades of evening began to close around me. Desperately, frantically I struck out, and shot through the water at quite three miles an hour—for I was a swift and powerful swimmer; but all in vain; and when in a short time the black squall disappeared in the distant horizon, and the bright rays of the setting sun illumined the wide expanse of ocean, I realised all the full horror of my situation.

The balloon was nowhere to be seen, and I was alone, battling with the waves, in the midst of the Atlantic Ocean!

CHAPTER XXI.

ALONE, SWIMMING IN THE MIDST OF THE WIDE ATLANTIC.

My feelings may possibly be conceived by some few (only by those who have themselves experienced the extremity of mortal peril, when all hope seemed gone, death inevitable), but can certainly never be described.

The dull wash of the waves, and my own laborious breathing as I struggled on, were the sounds which broke the dismal, the tremendous solitude. What was the solitude of Robinson Crusoe, of Selkirk, to mine? My case was as that of the last man, alone, in full health and strength, and doomed never more to look on the face of human being. Such were my thoughts as I struggled on, my strength gradually failing, as hope already had. I had thus been swimming for more than an hour, when I noticed that a faint air of wind was blowing; I turned and faced it, for the sea now began to feel oppressively warm, and the cool breeze was most grateful. But as I still paddled on, the instinct of life *compelling* me so to do, even against all hope, another fact became apparent—the breeze was strongly rising, and *with it the sea*.

I knew what this foreboded—a *speedy death from drowning*; for although a powerful swimmer might by great exertion keep himself afloat for hours, perhaps even for a day, in smooth water, half an hour of a short chopping sea would assuredly drown the strongest swimmer in the world, much more a poor youth like myself, weak and exhausted from privation and fatigue.

No matter!—let death come, and come quickly. Already my arms began to ache, my breath came quick and painful, my brain grew dizzy, and my eyesight dim.

These were my thoughts, as I swam slowly on with fast-failing strokes in the black obscurity. Presently the wind, which had threatened to increase, sank, and

HOPE.

but on second thought this could not be, as these fish are compelled to come up and blow every few moments ; while those which had passed beneath and around me never came to the surface, so far as I could judge.

Strange to say, the reaction from the sudden terror seemed to have put fresh strength into my failing limbs, and I found less difficulty than heretofore in supporting myself. Now again I felt a breeze on my cheek, and turning as before to meet it, swam on slowly with measured strokes, using no more exertion than was absolutely necessary.

A new hope now seized me. If I could only keep afloat till daybreak, some sail might be in sight, or land, or perhaps the balloon—who could say ? And with that buoyancy of spirit which has brought me through so many perils, I persuaded myself that it would be so. I judged that it was now past midnight : in about five more hours day would begin to break, and if I could only struggle on so long, I might possibly be saved. But, alas ! I soon found my powers begin to fail me again. The breeze, too, rose once more strongly, but steadily, and sent every now and then a dash of water over my face and head, blinding and filling my mouth—telling me that the end was fast approaching, and that I could not last much longer.

Half an hour passed, and at the expiration of that time I felt so exhausted, that I was forced to desist swimming, and keep myself afloat by paddling gently with my hands, and unceasingly treading water to give ease. But as the time wore on, my weakness increased apace. Now, in spite of all my efforts, the waves would frequently dash right over my head, and I had to renew my exertions in order to keep my head higher, and prevent this, which, if repeated a few times more, would assuredly end my earthly troubles. Still I struggled on ; though, as if bent on my destruction, the cruel winds rose, and the remorseless waves reared

it fell once more dead calm. Ahead, around, I could see nothing but the dark expanse of ocean, above me the gloomy, starless sky—while the dismal plash of the waves made the darkness and solitude more dreary. Presently, and without the slightest warning, I felt something touch my feet. A moment my heart beat wildly. Could it be that some current^t had drifted me to land—might it not be a sand-bank, or perhaps a portion of some wreck, my feet had touched ?

I was soon undeceived—to my horror ; for the next instant I felt a quick rush of a cold, slippery body, and then saw before me a phosphorescent gleam in the sea, as some object darted quickly by. I screamed, and my heart stood still with terror. A fish !—a monstrous fish !

A shark ! Oh, horror ! No wonder the blood froze in my veins at the dreadful thought ; still, though I came near it, I did not faint. I know not what it was that at that terrible moment kept up my energy : but I hesitated not a moment, and, prompted more by instinct than by reason, turned round, and commenced swimming in an opposite direction, as swiftly, and with as little splash, as possible.

Perhaps the monster had not seen me ! Such was my desperate hope. Any death were preferable to that. Drowning were surely a luxury to it ; but I had scarce made a stroke in an opposite direction than I again stopped aghast. For I saw that the sea was all phosphorescent with gleams of light, and could even distinguish beneath my feet in its great bosom streaks of light and large luminous bodies darting about. Instantly a flash of joy illuminated my soul. I was for the present safe from the horrid jaws of the sea-tigers. Sharks never go in shoals or schools—usually in pairs, oftener alone.

What these fish were, I had no means of knowing, for they soon darted away, and left me, as before, alone in the dreary expanse of sea and sky. They might be albigores or bonettas. Porpoises, perhaps, I thought ;

their crests higher and higher, till not even by the most desperate exertions could I keep my head from being submerged again and again.

The salt-water blinded, choked, and half-suffocated me.

Again and once again,—till at last my senses began to fail me, and I felt slightly delirious, though I still struck out, and, gasping, panting, drowning, managed to get an occasional breath.

What is that I hear ? Music !

Ay, music ! heavenly music !

Bright angels singing sweet songs to welcome me. Now a wave washes right over me, and it is some seconds before I can get my head up to breathe. God have mercy on me ! Adieu, bright world ! Hopes, fears, ambition, dreams,—all fade away !

So does the sky—so does the sea—so does my consciousness.

Hark ! music again. I can hear a song—a rhythmic chant borne across the bosom of the ocean. Is it true, or is it a phantom of my brain ?

Nerved I know not how, for I am rapidly sinking, I again make a few frenzied strokes, and listen.

Yes ! I am not mistaken. I hear a slow, monotonous chant come pealing over the waves in the silence of the night.

The wind at that moment lulls, nor do the waves dash so hard. I hear it !—a song, a song !—and sung by a mortal voice !

CHAPTER XXII.

HEAVENLY MUSIC !—SAVED !

“ Tan-a-toony,
 Hey-ah !
 Tan-a-toony,
 Hey-ah !”

SUCH was the monotonous refrain borne to me by the wind. But to me, in my despair, no song warbled by opera *prima donna*, no grand and rolling oratorio, no earthly music—ay, no heavenly music—could bring such joy.

I knew the voice. It was that of Ramoon, and the rude song he was singing was a sort of chorus I had often heard lascars and coolies make use of when hauling in a rope.

I gathered all my strength, and, battling fiercely with the waves and my own weakness, shouted with all my force,

“ Ramoon ! Ramoon !”

The song ceased, and my soul thrilled with emotion. I was heard.

There was a dead silence, as though the voice had paused to listen.

Again, with my whole strength, I shouted out,

“ Ramoon ! Here, save me ! I am drowning !”

Then, in reply, I heard the well-known voice :

“ Oh, ba Jumbo, who da crocodile am dat ?”

“ Here, here !” I again cried, forgetting that if, as in all probability was the case, he was in the balloon, he could not direct its movements, but that it would drift with the wind wherever it wafted him. A thrill of horror shot through me as I thought of this. The balloon might drift by me, and I could not possibly intercept it, even had I not been much exhausted, but strong. For I knew that even the faintest air

moved at three or four miles an hour, whereas I could not swim at the rate of one. "Ramoons, Ramoons!" I cried, in despairing accents; "it is I! Here! Save me!"

"Hullo!" I heard him shout in reply; "is dat you, gub'nor? Whar is you? In de sea, or in de clouds, or in kingdom come? If you is, tan't no use. I don't want no ghosts. Dis chicken be one hisself 'fore long."

I strained my eyes in the direction of the voice, and could faintly discover a large black object in the gloom: "The balloon!"

Each moment it swept yet nearer to me. Not directly towards me, however, but as if it would pass downward about a couple of hundred yards to my left. I gathered all my remaining strength, and struck out, hoping to intercept it. But, alas, my efforts were necessarily feeble, my progress slow, and, though I did my very utmost, I saw it would pass me, and sail away with the wind.

"Ramoons, Ramoons!" I shouted, with despairing energy; "pull the valve-string; let out gas, and veer away on the lifeboat line. I'm not a ghost, but soon shall be if you don't save me."

The balloon was quite close now—not more than a hundred yards to my left, and about the same distance from the sea. I could now, too, perceive the lifeboat towing behind, with her stern only touching the water, and at once conjectured that Ramoon had been endeavouring to haul her up. Hence the song.

It was marvellous what renewed vitality hope had put into my exhausted system. My faculties seemed sharpened, as well as my energies revived, and I could plainly hear Ramoon bustling about the platform, and soon distinguished the rushing sound of the gas as it escaped. Then I noticed that the boat sank down into the sea on even keel, and the balloon itself slowly descended also.

I still swam with all my force, and noticed with joy indescribable that I lessened the distance between

the boat and myself, which I could now see was not more than fifty yards off.

She acted in a measure as an anchor to the balloon ; for, fortunately for me, as I afterwards discovered, she was half full of water, and, what with the escape of gas, and the extra weight, the drift with the wind was not quite so fast as the pace at which I was enabled to swim. Still it was slow work. Inch by inch I struggled on, battling savagely with the waves, with a strength and determination of which I should have been quite incapable half an hour previously.

Nearer and nearer I got to my haven of safety. I soon heard the splash of the water as the boat was towed along. Fortunately the breeze did not rise ; on the contrary, it rather sank, and each moment the distance lessened, and my hopes were raised in proportion. I could now see Ramoon leaning over the platform, and supposed he could also see me. Anyhow, breath was too precious to be wasted in words. A few more strokes, and I am safe. Now twenty yards scarce separate us. Providence be thanked ! the wind at this moment lulled yet more. One more minute of desperate exertion, and I clutch the gunwale of the boat, and am saved.

Saved! Who can ever appreciate the glorious ecstasy of that moment, as, having scrambled on board, I sank panting and utterly exhausted in the stern sheets?

Saved! Saved from a death, languishing amid a dreary waste of sea—unnoticed, unpitied, and unknown!

If I live for a thousand years, I feel certain I shall never again experience a moment of such bliss.

"Saved!"

I murmured the word to myself, and fell into something between a swoon and a sleep.

* * * * *

When I came to myself, I found I was lying at the bottom of the boat, and my head resting on a thwart, and the water washing all over me up to my chin. It was quite calm, and I had been so long immersed that I felt no inconvenience.

Glancing around, I perceived that the balloon still floated ahead, and above us, and that the boat was towing at the rate of perhaps four miles an hour, for the breeze had again freshened. I think it was Ramoon who aroused me, for now that I was awake and conscious, I could hear him constantly laughing.

"I say, gub'nor, am you dead? What for you no get up? De wind comin', and by-by de boat upset."

"All right, my friend," I answered; "I am better now. Throw down a rope, so that I can make a tow-line for you to haul me up. I shall be strong enough presently, but now I feel very weak and faint."

"All right, gub'nor; look out."

Then he threw out a rope's end, which, after a minute or two, I succeeded in catching, and having rested a little longer, made a tow-line, and placed myself therein. I was very careful to fix it securely, for I knew that if I again fell into the sea nothing could save me.

I said to Ramoon: "Are you ready to pull up? Tie the end of the rope to the small winch, and heave away when I sing out. Are you ready? Haul away."

Then I again committed myself to the waves, which had so nearly proved my destruction. But I felt Ramoon begin to heave on the rope immediately, and, in a short time, I was right under the balloon. Then I felt myself lifted from the water, and in a minute managed to scramble upon the platform. Ramoon—honest heart!—fell weeping on my neck, overjoyed to think I had returned safely after my perilous and all but disastrous bath. A draught of brandy wonderfully revived me, and I was enabled to recount what had happened to myself, and listen to him.

"Well, gub'nor," he began, "just 'xactly after you jump out, soon de wind begin to blow; de berloon begun to go—I didn't know it at fust, ebery thing was so quiet; but soon as ever I did, I began to try to stop him. Fust, I throwed out a sand-bag. Dat ony make go wurser, and lift de boat out o' water pretty high.

Den I 'gun a pullin' o' de strings, and dat warn't no use neither, for de berloon come down close to de water, and sailed along like olc boots; well, den it come on to rain, and I couldn't see you nor nuffin' else; well, as I couldn't do no good any how, I thought I'd go for to catch some water, an' so I did—didn't I drink, neiver!—forty hundred pailfuls—and filled de big barrel as well."

I smiled at the forty hundred pailfuls, but said nothin', as I knew my friend's proneness for exaggeration.

"When de rain and de smoke and fog go 'way, I looks about—you's gone—nowhere in sight. So sez I, he's bin an' gone and lef' me and swum back agin. Well, de night comes, and I tinks to myself I'd better go back too, leas'wise go some'here—and den I sez to myself, dis 'ere boat's a stopping of me and de barloon—so up he comes—den I begins a haulin' on him, when I hears some 'un holler—fust I thinned it were a ghost or dibbel, or a flyin' man-jumper like we see down in de sea, gub'nor. Presently I knows it's you, an' I years wot yer say, an' does it, and here we is."

"Here we are, as you say, thanks to you, Ramoon, next to Providence. Water, too—a whole barrel full; fortune favours us, Ramoon, my boy—we shall yet weather the storm, and our names will go down to posterity as the most marvellous, the most daring, the most successful adventurers since the days of Columbus and Francis Drake. Come, let's 'licker up,' as the Yankees say, and then hoist the boat."

This was soon done, and when he had hoisted the boat, and got rid of a bag or two of ballast, the balloon rose slowly. The dawn was now breaking fast, and, completely tired out by fatigue and excitement, I went into the house, and, after giving strict directions to my faithful subordinate, sank into a deep sleep. I will reserve the events of the next and succeeding days for another chapter.

CHAPTER XXIII.

WE HOOK A WHALE—OUR OCEAN STEED—FORTY MILES
AN HOUR.

MY first care on awaking was to ascertain the state of the balloon. This I found to be tolerably satisfactory, although I was somewhat alarmed at the great decrease in the volume of gas. Large quantities had been allowed to escape by the valve; and there was also a continual loss by leakage. To compensate for this loss of gas, I found that we had parted with nearly all our ballast, in the shape of sand-bags, and the balloon still showed a tendency to descend. It behoved us, then, to be very careful of the remaining ballast, and not to descend unnecessarily, as of course that would involve more loss of gas by the valves. After doing what little was necessary to the silk netting and valves, I proceeded to secure the lifeboat as before, and having done so, cast my gaze around to discover in what direction and at what pace we were drifting. Alas! what little wind there was came from the north, and we were slowly floating back towards the equator. The faint breeze gradually fell, till about an hour or so after noon a dead calm again reigned, and the swell of the sea rose and fell like huge billows of glass.

Again we experienced the same blistering, blinding heat, varied occasionally by rain squalls and faint cat's-paws of wind.

I will not particularise each day that passed, for one was so like its fellow in dreary monotony that the task would be a needless one.

We floated about, sometimes sailing slowly one day to be drifted back the next, for a period of ten days, without any incident worthy of note. Our position began to grow desperate; there seemed no hope of ever escaping from these terrible regions of eternal calm. Our stock of water, too, began to diminish, for the showers had not been heavy, and lately we had not

been visited by any, so that, what with evaporation, and our inordinate thirst caused by the heat, we had scarcely enough for another fortnight at the outside.

Occasionally we saw a school of porpoises or black fish; beyond these no living being met our weary gaze. It was on the morning of the twelfth day that, casting my eye around the horizon, I perceived beneath me some heavy black specks, and several large objects in the sea, distant about two miles. At first I took them for boats, or pieces of rock, and my heart beat high with hope. But presently I found out my mistake, for, as we drifted slowly towards them, I knew by the spouting jets of water thrown up that they were whales. They were very large ones of their kind, and I watched them as they gambolled about for some time with no other feeling than that of curiosity. But when I discovered that we were drifting in such a direction that we might pass right over them, a new and strange idea struck me. I immediately let out gas, and caused the balloon to descend quite close to the water. Then I lowered by a rope a chest filled with pieces of iron and other heavy substances, till it touched the water. This I intended to use as a sort of anchor for us: the current of air was so faint as to be barely perceptible. I judged that by lowering the box right into the sea I could make the balloon very nearly stationary at pleasure. Again, by hauling up the box, we should drift with the wind as before.

In half an hour's time we were quite close to these monsters of the deep, and I lowered the box into the sea, intending to stop our progress till one or both the whales were dead to leeward, so that on hauling up again we should float right over them. While awaiting this circumstance I hastened to make my other arrangements. I got out from the house a strong but light chain, to which I attached a heavily weighted harpoon.

"What you goin' up to, gub'nor?" asked Ramoon.

"Harpoon dem great beast?—what good?—we no want blubber; 'sides, how get 'em up?"

"All right, Ramoon," I said, "it's not blubber I'm after. You're tired of this life, are you not?"

"Ba, Jumbo, yes."

"Well, my boy, I am going to harness one of these spouters, and drive him in single harness. Do you understand?"

Ramoon opened his eyes wide, and very evidently did not understand. So I proceeded to explain my scheme to him, which was briefly this, as perhaps the reader may have perceived: I intended to float right over one of the great mammoth fishes, and plunge the harpoon into him. I trusted that by letting the chest and every available article and bag of ballast go, the buoyancy of the balloon would be such, that he would not be able to dive, but would be compelled to dash along at the surface, of course dragging us along with him. Thus I hoped the monster would drag us out of the belt of perpetual calms before he gave up exhausted. Then we should again be drifted by steady winds till we reached some land or other.

This was my idea: let us see how it worked.

So soon as we were right over the larger whale, having previously stationed Ramoon to see the chain clear, and given him instructions what to do, I took good aim and chopped the weighted harpoon. It went whizzing down and plunged far into the blubber on the whale's back.

"Let go the box, Ramoon!" I cried to my assistant; "out with the ballast, or he'll pull us under."

Ramoon quickly obeyed, and soon we were lighter by some eight hundred pounds. Instantly the balloon sought to shoot up, and the chain tightened, and almost at the same moment the whale seemed to feel the harpoon, and, after a lash or two with his tail and spouting once or twice, he essayed to dive down to depths unknown, probably with the idea of getting rid of that thing sticking in his back. For a moment

the issue was doubtful. The impetus of his first rush was tremendous, the shock throwing us from our feet, and causing several loose articles to roll off the platform. He dragged us down till the keel of the boat touched the water, and fearing he would succeed in pulling us under, I scrambled about, and threw out as many portable heavy objects as were not of much value. The swaying and rocking of the platform were tremendous, and the tugs at the chain fearful. I was just on the point of cutting the lashings of one of the small cannons, when I noticed that our aerial machine rose a little higher, despite the desperate efforts of our unruly steed to "upset the coach." He still struggled and plunged, however, for some time; but the buoyant power of the gas was too much for him, and, foot by foot, yard by yard, we rose, till his huge black back appeared at the surface. After blowing once or twice, sending sheets of water up to the balloon, and deluging us in the car, he commenced lashing the water furiously with his tail till all was hidden in foam and spray. The sight and sound were both grand in the extreme. The huge vortex of water below foamed, boiled, and splashed, emitting all the while a roaring, thrashing noise. But presently our friend began to tire of his exertions, or perhaps found their futility, and, after a moment's pause, dashed ahead on the surface at a terrible speed. The balloon at one time was in an almost perfectly horizontal position, and we had to hold on as best we could: soon, however, it righted a little, and I was enabled to watch the scene.

Away tore the whale through the calm ocean, leaving behind him a huge track of foam, sending spouts of water high up in the air, and occasionally trying in vain to dive. At last he settled down quietly to work, and I am convinced that the frightened monster rushed through the sea, dragging us after him, at a rate of quite forty miles an hour.

Despite the peril, the excitement was glorious.

Onwards—onwards—our air carriage went, dragged by our ocean horse, whose wind and mettle did not seem to fail him, for he kept up his speed admirably. I soon got quite accustomed to the rush of the air as we tore along, and began to make observations as to the direction in which we were going. I soon found it by means of our compass. We were dashing along at full forty miles an hour on a course due east. I did not know our exact latitude; but we were certainly near the equator, and I judged that if our harnessed monster would keep up his pace for a couple of days, we should have made 2000 miles, which ought to bring us near the west coast of Africa. Evening closed around, and threw her dark mantle over us. Still no pause in our speed. A bright blaze of phosphorescent light, a head ending in a comet-like tail behind, showed where the harpooned whale still rushed through the calm sea. I could see this phosphorescent tail far, far behind us, marking our track like a train of fire. On—still on, all night, till the sun, rising ahead in the east, met our runaway steed full in the eyes. It almost seemed as though in his wild fury he were intent on running down the great luminary of day, for he steered on a course right towards him.

In the afternoon our speed slackened a little, and at the same time, from some reason best known to himself, our whale veered a point or two towards the north-east. This I did not object to at all, as the farther north we went, the more we should get out of the belt of calms. I calculated that from the same time on the previous day we had made at least a thousand miles, and our speed had now diminished but very little.

On—still on—till the noonday sun sank in the west, and once again the shades of evening closed around us.

Night came on, clear, calm, and beautiful. The vault of heaven above was studded with myriads of

stars; the moon cast her clear-shining light on the broad expanse of ocean, and the phosphorescence caused by the whale's swift rush through the sea lent fresh glories to the scene.

And now the monster began to slacken in speed; it was evident he was tiring—and no wonder, considering the tremendous force at which he had been tearing along for the last two days.

His spoutings grew more frequent and noisy, while the clear moonlight revealed that the streams of water he sent up were tinged with blood.

Slower, still slower, grew his onward progress, and soon the balloon, which had been at times almost horizontal, assumed a perpendicular position, and floated nearly over the great fish, who now laboured along with rapidly failing speed and strength.

It was now I noticed that a light breeze had arisen, blowing from the west. As we were going to the east this eased the whale's labours somewhat, but I saw that the end was fast approaching. As the first light of day began to dawn in the east, he ceased entirely his onward motion, and, after lying nearly motionless on the surface for some few minutes, commenced to lash the water furiously with his tail, at the same time attempting to sound. But it was only a feeble attempt, and did not succeed in dragging the balloon even near to the water. Then the poor animal, evidently in the last extremity, again lashed the water, sending the spray flying, and causing a vortex of white water all around. Not altogether white, however, for, as the sun arose and cast his light around, I noticed that the sea was tinged with scarlet for many a yard around. And now the westerly breeze freshened, and the balloon commenced to strain on the chain, and in turn slowly tore the unwieldy body of the whale. I saw that the last hour of the great fish was rapidly approaching, and determined to sever our connection, and let the wind drift us whither it might cloose.

The harpoon was too deeply imbedded for there to

be any chance of drawing it out, so I cut adrift the end of the chain, and cast it into the sea. Instantly the wind bore us away from the dying whale, and in half an hour's time all that could be seen of the great fish was a black spot to the westward, from which ever and anon spots of bloody water would arise, while occasionally in his last agonies the sea was lashed into a vortex of foam. Rapidly the breeze freshened and the sea began to rise. I now set to work to calculate our latitude, and found that we were about 12° or 720 miles, north of the equator, and that our present course was S.E., the wind having shifted again to the N.W. Just as evening commenced to close around us, I noticed to the eastward what appeared to be a fog-bank, or stream of heavy dark clouds, close to the horizon. But at the time the light was so uncertain that I could not distinguish with any certainty what it was. So, as the night was clear, the wind light, and there seemed to be no danger, I left Ramoon on watch, and turned in for a few hours' repose, which much needed.

CHAPTER XXIV

LAND, HO !

RAMOON awoke me, according to my directions, at midnight, and I at once arose and went out on the platform. I found that the breeze had fallen very light but that we were still drifting slowly to the eastward. Ramoon had gone down, and by the faint starlight I could distinguish a dark line on the eastern horizon which might be fog, or cloud, or any thing. But at about five bells the breeze again freshened up, and soon a strong westerly wind was blowing. It brought up with it a dense white fog, which, by degrees, enveloped us, and obscured first all to the westward, and then rendered dim and indistinct all to the east. Bu

when day began to dawn the fog was not thick enough towards the east to conceal every thing, and I could dimly make out a line of low land, backed by high mountains.

Land, ho !

The sound brought fresh hope, fresh aspirations. What land was it ?

Africa !—that vast and almost unexplored continent ; along the seaboard and outskirts of which the white man has planted a few scattered settlements. But the interior—the vast, unknown interior—the home of the lion, the rhinoceros, the great river horse, the giraffe, the crocodile, the camel, the huge elephant, the swift gazelle, the prowling hyena, the wolf, the leopard ! Land of the fabulous unicorn !—of men with tails and horns ! Land of the jaguar, of the chimpanzee, and of the great gorilla—that hideous mockery of man !—and, lastly, the land through which the great river of immemorial antiquity pursues its silent course, and whose source has been for ages the subject of dispute, of adventure, and of exploration.

The ambitious dream dawned on my soul. Why should not I—humble, unknown—make my name ring throughout the world as the solver of the problem of ages, the discoverer of the *Source of the Nile* ?

These were my ambitious thoughts as the rising gale wafted me yet faster towards the great continent, and the thickening mist hid all from my gaze.

Once, and once only, did I get a glimpse of the land, and that was but a momentary one, but in that instant I discovered that we were close on the land, and were rapidly drifting over it. In another half hour at the outside we should have bidden adieu to old Ocean, and again hang suspended over *terra firma*.

I now turned my attention to the balloon, and was somewhat anxious about the great escape of gas which had taken place. The great air bag had lost its round globe-like shape, and now resembled the section of ar

orange, all the lower part having collapsed. I discovered that we had been, and still were, slowly, though steadily, descending.

Accordingly, as it would have been rash in the extreme to have ventured on a descent to earth, which I had no doubt was now beneath us, in so dense a mist, and with so violent a wind blowing, I threw out some heavy articles, in order again to ascend. This we did, and soon the mist or fog was spread beneath us like a vast sheet or table-cloth, through which nothing whatever could be distinguished. Patience was the only thing under the circumstances. From the brief glimpse I had had of the land, I formed an impression, assisted by my own calculations, that it must have been a part of the Gold or Ivory Coast.

Subsequently, I had every reason to believe that my first conjecture was correct. Towards evening the mist began to clear off, though the wind still blew as violently as ever, rendering a descent all but impossible.

The rays of the setting sun illumined a splendid panorama. Beneath me, at the distance of half a mile, there lay a vast expanse of fertile country, densely wooded in parts, in others covered by a luxuriant growth of underwood, only seen in the tropics. Far away to the north I saw a great sheet of water, which I conjectured to be a lake with several rivers, which, from this elevation, looked like silver threads, diversifying the picture. To the extreme east, half-hidden in the mist of distance, I could discern huge, gloomy mountains, cloud-capped, and evidently of vast height.

I commenced carefully scanning the country beneath me through my telescope, in the hope of discovering some signs of human habitation, but in vain. Several times I made out moving objects on the open spaces of the forest, and by the sides of the rivers. These, however, I found to be wild beasts, and their

numbers proved that if human foot had ever trodden these vast forests, certainly they could not be permanently inhabited at the present time.

I could tell by the waving of the forest trees that a hard wind still prevailed, and the approach of night forbade any hope of a descent till the sun should again have risen on another day in this my perilous and eventful journey. Night came, and as its black cloak hid the earth beneath from my sight, the heavens above became obscured by murky clouds, while in the distance I could hear a dull rumbling, which I guessed to be thunder.

The fair face of the silver moon, the diamond-sparkling stars, are all hid from my sight, and each moment the gloomy blackness grows more profound.

The rumble of the thunder grew heavy and more distinct, till all around the horizon, and more especially to the eastward, I could discern the flashing, darting lightning. Now, for the first time, I realised a fresh peril.

Supposing the electric fluid should, in its erratic course from cloud to cloud, or cloud to earth, strike the balloon, what would be the result?

A flash! a fierce, roaring explosion! and then a few rags of silk, and a confused mass, would fall to earth, and myself and companion meet with a death sudden and terrible. The more I thought on the subject, the more imminent the danger appeared. The clouds around, above, and below were highly charged with electricity; hither and thither the flashes darted from cloud to cloud, anon to earth, while the thunder kept up a continual low growl. The heat was oppressive; and though I conjectured that the wind still blew strongly, not a breath was perceptible, as the balloon was borne with it.

Louder and louder roared the hoarse thunder—the lightning flashed almost perpetually, its lurid, ghastly glare illumining the black canopy of the skies almost continuously. It was evident that we

were being borne into the vortex of a tropical thunder-storm.

And now far away to the east I could discern a dark, lurid glare, which each moment grew redder and fiercer looking, till the whole horizon in that direction glared with a red-hot blaze fearful to contemplate. What was it? For aught I knew, we might be drifting to the gates of hell, and, as if to confirm this idea, I could now distinguish above the crash of the thunder a dull, sullen sound, like that of ten thousand blast-furnaces. I knew by the rapid increase in the red gleam to the east that we were swiftly approaching this terrible locality, while behind us the gloom seemed to deepen, except when the darting lightning lit up the heavens.

And yet, amid all the tumult of the elements—the rolling thunder, the flashing lightning, and the dull roaring sound, which each moment seemed to approach—the balloon floated calmly on, as though utterly motionless.

Soon the distant red glare to the east grew more plain, and dimly, through the black clouds and mist beneath, a lurid glare was apparent, such as is observable near the crater of Vesuvius and other volcanoes by night. But every thing was hid by a mantle of black cloud, which enveloped all around as with a pall; and though I strained my eyes to penetrate the gloom, I could distinguish nothing. The dense cloud in which we were was highly charged with electricity, and I now noticed the vivid lightning playing around with feelings of great alarm. Thinking that by elevation we might pass out of the cloud, and so obtain comparative safety, I pulled the valve-string in order that gas might escape. Scarcely, however, had it commenced to do so than I was apprised by a loud, roaring noise, and a bright light, that some disaster had occurred.

A glance upwards informed me of its nature. lightning darting about in the atmosphere had

course traversed the stream of gas escaping from the valve, and set it alight. With a cry of terror I threw myself on my knees, prepared for instant death. As the gas escaped, it burned with a light flame and great noise, but did not explode. The valve was almost instantly destroyed, so that there was no means of cutting off the supply. Down we plunged with headlong speed, blazing away all the time like a meteor. Each moment the velocity of our fall increased, as more of the gas escaped and was burned. The balloon, too, around the valve began to catch fire, and I looked every moment for a terrible explosion, and headlong fall to earth.

But though the upper part of the balloon was now in flames, the lower part expanded and spread out, forming a sort of parachute, and thus checking greatly the velocity of the fall.

I could see through the semi-transparent silk the blaze of the flame above, and could hear plainly the rushing, roaring sound of the burning gas.

The next moment, with a heavy shock, the boat and platform struck the ground, and I was thrown out on what I first supposed was hot sand. The balloon fell heavily on one side, and in so doing the blazing rent whence the gas issued was undermost, and the flame was extinguished. Again I was saved, as it appeared, by a miracle, and, scrambling to my feet, commenced to survey the place where I had fallen.

I discovered, to my surprise, that what I had first supposed to be sand was a thick layer of fine, soft ashes, and that these were quite hot.

Where was I? I gazed around, and saw on several sides red fire gleaming through the darkness. This fact, with the sulphurous vapours around, at last caused me to realise our position. We had fallen in the vast crater of a slumbering volcano,—quiescent now, but which at any time might break out, and vomit fire, lava, and smoke.

Till day should break, and reveal the nature of

the mountain and our exact position, I was powerless to act; and, though suffering much from the stifling sulphuric vapours, I seated myself on a portion of the platform, prepared to await the fate which daylight would reveal to me as probable.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE MYSTERIOUS RIVER.

THE first gray mists of morning revealed to my astonished gaze a dismally dreary scene: the stifling vapours continually oozing slowly from the crevices in the porous, dust-like soil, at a little distance produced an effect like a fog or mist, through which I could dimly perceive the steep, towering hills which bounded the dismal valley.

It seemed as though the light of the sun was totally inadequate to penetrate and illumine the gloomy profound; for the light did not increase, but remained dim and uncertain. And now I could hear faintly in the distance strange sounds and cries, some like those of great birds, others of a deeper tone, resembling rather wild beasts of some description.

When I found that the dim light did not improve, I resolved to start on an exploring expedition; so I informed Ramoon of my plan, and off we started.

First, however, I took my compass, and accurately observed the bearings and the direction in which I proposed walking, so that by no possibility could I fail to regain the balloon when so inclined. This, of course, would have been an irreparable disaster, as all our apparatus, tools, instruments, food, and water would have been lost to us at one fell swoop in such an event.

“Ramoon, be careful to follow close in my steps; and if you see any thing, at once inform me.”

The poor black fellow, who was now utterly cast

down and dispirited by our dismal situation, answered merely by a guttural grunt, and proceeded to follow me. The walking was heavy, my feet sinking above the ankles at each step in the soft powder or ashes which formed the soil. Still I pressed on, hoping that some one would emerge from the dismal, dreary fog which enveloped us, and hid all things like a curtain.

I soon found that we were descending, and that the soil beneath our feet was becoming rougher and less pulverised. Presently we came to a stratum or layer of huge rocks, which seemed to bar our further progress. However, after again observing by the compass the direction in which I had come, I proceeded to clamber over the obstruction in our front, followed by Ramoon. As I again reached the top of this ledge of rocks, I was enabled to gain a somewhat clearer view, for soon the mist and darkness seemed to lift a little. All around, in whichever direction I looked, I saw the same towering rocks, which seemed to take the shape of lofty buildings, with minarets and spires towering up into the clouds.

We were in or near the centre of a vast valley, hemmed in on every side by great cliffs of ragged rock, which seemed to pierce the canopy of heaven itself. I had before come to the conclusion that we had fallen in the crater of an extinct, though probably still slumbering, volcano, and now each new fact confirmed me in my first opinion. The stifling, sulphurous vapours, the vast quantity of powdered ashes, and, above all, the circular shape of the valley, with its deeply sunken centre, all convinced me I was right.

It was a terrible conclusion at which to arrive, and one which held out little hope of ultimate escape.

Determined to penetrate, if possible, right across to the other side, I struggled over the rocks, and commenced cautiously to descend the slope. It was now that in the dim white mist beyond I could discern moving objects, and a shock of horror shot through my frame. What could they be?

STRANGE MONSTERS.

At first I could not frame any answer to this question, but presently I decided that they must be wild beasts, birds, or reptiles, which inhabited the rocky sides of the mountains. Presently, as I still struggled on, I noticed that the ground became damp and sticking to my feet, and soon I was of opinion that we were approaching water.

The thought flashed across my mind that it was very improbable the water should be entirely stagnant. Most likely it would flow somewhere, through a fissure in the mountain-side, and out into the plain. The idea gave me fresh energy, and I pressed on, eager to learn the truth or falsehood of this hypothesis.

The ground now ran downwards with a gentle slope, while each moment the boulders and stones increased in frequency and size. I noticed occasionally dim objects in the air, floating about with the vague flitting motions of bats or owls. But I could make out also that these birds, or whatever they were, were of large size; and I could occasionally and indistinctly make out their monstrous bodies and huge, flapping wings. And now, too, I at times discerned huge shapes crawling about on the land, and presently I heard the sullen splash of water, as though some enormous fish or reptile were disporting himself.

As I walked on, I came to frequent puddles of water, and soon I saw before my eyes a broad sheet, almost hid by the thick mantle of heavy mist which hung over it. I quickened my steps, and, wading ankle-deep through mud and puddle, I rapidly approached the brink.

And now I became aware that the shore of this Stygian lake was teeming with life. Little lizards crawled about, and started up at every step I took; while big lizards and other reptiles ran off, making a dull, croaking sound, to the water, into which they plunged with a splash, and were lost to my view.

But there were other strange monsters, some slimy, some scaly, others resembling huge shell-fish, whose joints crackled as they walked, or rather crawled, away.

On all hands I heard the stealthy creep of these things—the dragging sound of their bodies as they crawled across the stones, the dull, croaking sounds to which they gave utterance, and the final splash as they plunged into the water. I noticed too, now, a horrible sickly effluvium, worse even than the mephitic sulphurous vapours which had before nearly suffocated me. At last I reached the brink of the waters of this loathsome, unknown, and unnamed pool or stream. One moment convinced me that it was not a pond or lake, but a veritable river; for, although its progress was slow, I could distinctly note the current as it flowed on slowly, sluggishly, but surely.

The shores of this strange river teemed with life; reptiles and fishes splashed and gambolled within a foot of the shore, while, as far as I could see for the pall-like mist, the surface was alive with them.

My mind was immediately made up. I would go back, and, with Ramoon's aid, would contrive to drag the lifeboat down here, after having packed in her every thing I could. Then I would commit myself and companion to the mercy of this mysterious stream, trusting that it might float me out into the light of day.

CHAPTER XXVI.

I EQUIP AND LOAD THE BOAT, AND LAUNCH OUT ON THE MYSTERIOUS RIVER.

THE journey back over the rough stones and up the ascent was a far more difficult task than the other. Every few minutes I had to stop and consult my compass, for otherwise I could not possibly tell whether I was going right or not. The sharp rocks cut my

feet, and frequent falls caused every bone in my body to ache. Poor Ramoon was in even worse plight than myself, for he went barefoot, and before we reached the powdered ashes his feet were covered with cuts. After half an hour of weary toil we reached the ledge of rocks, and with feelings of hope and thankfulness climbed over, and made our way with comparative ease over the soft, sand-like soil, and safely regained the boat and the ruins of the balloon.

I gave Ramoon a strong draught of brandy, and having taken one myself, explained to him the paramount necessity of our instantly setting to work to equip and load the boat. The horrible atmosphere of this dismal valley already began to take effect on me, and I felt certain that twenty-four hours amid its pestilential vapours would be death.

So to work we went with a will; my first task was to clear away the mass of silk and netting which had fallen on the house, boat, and platform, so that we might get at our work.

This done, I proceeded to get every thing out of the house, and off the platform. Barrels, casks, provisions, iron-work, tool-chest, instruments, coils of rope, guns, the small cannon, ammunition, I dragged forth and arranged in a semicircle round the wreck of the balloon.

Then I proceeded to cut the house adrift from the platform, as otherwise I could not cant it over so as to get at the lifeboat. This done, I cut the boat from her lashings, and, dragging her hither, placed her even keel on the soft soil, scraping it away so as to make a bed for her.

And now I held a council of war with Ramoon as to how we should get her down to the water: we could scarcely drag her unloaded; what should we do when she had her cargo on board?

At last I hit upon the only feasible means of accomplishing it. Among the various things I had taken with me on my ascent were four pairs of bullock-

drag wheels—two large and two small—the very thing. I at once set to work to mount our boat on wheels, so that we could drag her down to the water.

Fortunately I had provided myself with a well-stocked tool-chest, and soon turned out two axle-trees, which I passed right through the boat two feet above her keel, so that when mounted on the wheels she might clear the ground by about that distance. I did not like the thought of this at first—knocking holes in her below the water-line—but on consideration I saw that it was not important, for I had all the necessary boat-builder's tools, and could thoroughly repair her again in half an hour.

This done, I proceeded to mount her on the wheels; first the fore part, afterwards the stern. And now our boat-wagon is fairly rigged, and we have only to load her and drag her down to be launched.

I was unwilling to leave all the silk and network of my poor balloon, so I cut away all the uninjured part, and, rolling it up tightly, stowed it in the stern of the boat. It may seem strange how I could find room for so great a mass of silk and cordage; but it must be remembered that, though the size was enormous when distended, it was easily packed in small compass when empty. I had still several bales of silk left, so that if I ever regained the land of light and life, I could repair the broken balloon, make another car, and again start on an aerial voyage. Next I stowed at the bottom and sides of the boat all the full and empty barrels and casks. In interstices of these I placed all the loose iron, lead for ammunition, and other heavy matter, in order that the boat might be well trimmed, and not top-heavy. I next placed one of the small cannon at the bow, another at the stern, and carefully stowed away the powder and bullets in the stern sheets; here also I deposited my guns, pistols, telescopes, instruments, and boxed up a small square place there, which I lined and covered with tarpaulin, in order that in any event they might be

kept dry. The provisions and dried meat I placed in the bows, as I did all heavy lumber and articles of not much value and of a non-perishable nature.

Finally, I completed the cargo by filling up all empty spaces with such small objects as I thought might be of utility. But when I had loaded the boat till I thought she could not safely bear more, I found that I must leave a great quantity behind. This I accepted as the least of two evils, and, having fastened a rope to her bows, bade farewell to the ruins of the balloon car and house, and started to haul her down to the unknown river.

For the first few hundred yards our progress was tolerably easy; the wheels sank somewhat deeply in the sand, but notwithstanding that we dragged her on till we were stopped by the barrier of rocks over which I had climbed.

Here was an apparently insurmountable obstacle, which threatened to bar our further progress in escaping from this horrible valley.

I stood for a time aghast—stupefied. Strange to say, this terrible impediment had never entered my head. What was to be done? I could not answer, and turned to Ramoon.

“Ramoon, my boy, what is to be done?—we are lost.”

“Say, gub’nor, dis am bad—can’t get ober dis nohow.”

“Impossible!”

“Den let’s go round.”

Ramoon’s words came on my mind like lightning on a dark night. How could I have been so foolish as not to think of it? It was one of those strange things which sometimes happen—as, for instance, when you are vainly searching for something which is all the time right under your nose.

I started off to the right, directing Ramoon to go to the left, to keep close to the ledge of rocks, and to shout out when he found a likely place. I had not gone three hundred yards when I heard his welcome

hail. I need scarcely say that I hurried back with all speed, and met him at our boat-wagon.

"Dere's a fine ole gap—made a puppus—come 'long—let's git out o' dis. Dis chicken don't like de smoke hyar."

So we hauled the boat's head round, and soon found the gap of which Ramoon spoke. It was very rough and stony, but quite practicable, and in a few minutes we had hauled our strange equipage through, and came out on damp, stony ground, sloping right down to the stream. The mist, fog, or whatever it was, now hung over the scene thicker than ever, so that we could not see half a dozen yards before us. But in the pauses of silence, when we stopped to rest, and the wheels no longer jolted and rumbled over the rocks and stones, I could again hear the splash of the water, the croaking of the beastly reptiles, and the hollow, funereal cawings (for to nothing else can I compare it) of the great birds, or flying things, whatever they were.

I now began to suffer much from headache and vertigo, from the effects of the deadly miasma of the place, combined with the hard labour of dragging so heavy an object.

But this was no time for flagging, and once again we tugged away; and as the slope got steeper we made better progress, notwithstanding the rough nature of the ground.

With encouraging words to Ramoon, I ran rapidly down, not heeding the jolts and bumping, till in a few minutes I again felt myself paddling along amidst pools of water, and then we were within a few yards of the brink.

I paused to take breath and listen: on all sides I could hear animals, reptiles, or living beings moving. The whole neighbourhood seemed to rustle with them, and the air was heavy with their faint, sickly odour. I could discern dimly through the eternal gloom grotesque, horrible shapes, writhing and wriggling about,

while in the water ahead there was one continual splashing and gurgling, as of myriads of loathsome creatures disporting themselves.

But this was no time for either listening or speculating; I at once went to work with Ramoon, and dragging the boat nearer, till her bows hung over the stream, proceeded to dismount her.

This done, with a "Yo! heave, ho!" we launched her into the black and sullen waters, leaping into the stern sheets ourselves as she shot away.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE UNKNOWN ABYSS.

AND now we were afloat on an unknown sea—drifting we knew not whither. I fetched a long breath, and looked around over the surface of the gloomy, sullen stream. I could see dark objects in rapid motion, now bobbing up their heads, now darting along the surface, now plunging out of sight into the depths below. I put my hand over the side.

To my astonishment the water was quite warm—almost hot. It felt, too, not like the light, clear water I had been used to in dancing English streams, but thick, greasy, slimy. I dipped a little up in the hollow of my palm, and tasted it. It was not fresh; it was not salt; but, worse than either, horribly nauseous and sickening, as though it came from a cesspool.

My brain reeled, and turned quite faint at the taste, stench, and thought. But a draught of brandy brought me somewhat round, and I now began to feel drowsy. I knew not whether I should ever wake again, but so strong was the feeling, that sleep I must.

I folded a blanket around me, all sensation faded away, and I sank into a deep, dreamless sleep.

* * * * *

When I awoke it was pitch dark.

I called "Ramoona ! Ramoona !"

No answer.

He, too, slept, and had not been awakened by the sound which roused me. What was it ?

I could not tell, and listened in silent horror. A dull, heavy, roaring sound, as of a vast cataract of water at a great distance tumbling into a deep abyss.

Whither were we being drifted ? Where were we ? I knew not. What had become of Ramoona ? Was he indeed asleep ? or had he fallen overboard into the water ? I crawled over to the bows of the boat, where I had last heard him, and found him fast asleep. He was no less horrified than myself at the distant rumbling roar we heard, and the pitchy darkness which encompassed us.

"A light !"—that was my next thought. I knew where to put my hand on some splinters of resinous wood, and at the bottom of the boat was a can of turpentine. I searched and found this, and then struck a match—of which I had plenty, fortunately—and lighted it. To get a better light, I lit four, one after the other ; giving two to Ramoona, and holding two myself.

As they blazed up, I looked around me. At first I could scarcely discern any thing ; by degrees I saw a huge, dense wall of black rock on my left hand. It did not give me the idea of a wall, but rather that of enormous boulders or rocks piled in wild disorder one above the other. Then I turned my eyes aloft, and beheld a vast flat roof of the same description of black rock. To the right I could see nothing but the black waters and darkness.

We were in an enormous cavern, or hollow place—that was certain ; otherwise there could not be a roof of rock overhead. In the bowels of the mountains, borne on by the stream—*whither ?* My spirit quailed as I thought of it. The distant rumbling and roaring filled me with terror. What did it mean ? Was

it some terrible Maelström to which we were hurrying, down which the waters ceaselessly rushed and roared? Or was it a cataract we approached, tumbling into some tremendous cavity? In either case, destruction, death, a horrible end, lay before us. It was now I felt a greater terror than ever before; for with the fear of death was mingled a supernatural dread, a dismal horror, of the unknown abyss into which I fancied we were being hurried.

When I fell from the balloon at a height of about four miles from the earth, I almost fainted with the sudden terror and the dizziness as I rushed through space; when I was swimming alone in the midst of the Atlantic by night, with nothing in sight but the sky and sea, and no hope of being saved,—on these occasions I thought I had tasted the bitterness of death. But even when alone on the ocean I could see the clear vault of heaven and the twinkling stars, and they reminded me of an all-merciful Providence, and of the dread Presence I should soon stand before.

But now—now it was far different. The dismal rumbling, the pitchy darkness, the foul, fetid air, led me in my horror to think that I was being hurried along to the jaws of the infernal regions, and plunged into the howling abyss. Hence my terror, which froze the blood in my veins, and almost made my heart stand still.

The time passed on, and still the same hideous darkness prevailed—for the torches had gone out, and I had not energy to light others. The roaring, rumbling, rushing sound continued; but now, instead of coming from ahead, it seemed to be on all sides—behind, around. I was too prostrated in spirit to think or reason, otherwise I might have derived comfort from this fact.

I knew not whether it was night or day, or how many hours had passed since we launched the boat. I lay in a kind of half-stupor unable either to remember or to look forward.

I cannot say how long I thus lay; but presently a faint, distant light beamed on my eyes. I scarcely noticed it at first, by reason of the despairing apathy into which I had sunk; but by degrees it dawned upon my mind that the light was increasing—that we were approaching it.

Gradually I raised myself—looked more intently. Yes, far away, on the port bow of the boat, there glimmered a white light; but whence it proceeded, or by what it was caused, I could not say. A sudden thrill shot through my frame, and my heart beat wildly.

Could it be the glorious light of day? Oh, happy thought! I rose and called Ramoon, but he answered me not. Again I crawled forward to seek him. He was lying on his face in the boat, moaning faintly. Poor fellow! the dismal horror which fell like a pall on me had quite overwhelmed him.

I shook him; and, encouraged by my voice, he rose to a sitting position, and seeing that he was trembling all over, I gave him a draught of brandy.

The light was now getting brighter every moment, and, to my joy, I fancied that the rumbling and roaring were less.

"Ramoon, Ramoon!" I said to him, "awake—arouse yourself; there is a light ahead—daylight—sunlight—I hope and trust!"

"Light!" he murmured; "we neber see de light agin."

"Look—look ahead—there, on the port bow."

He did so.

"Ah, yah! so dere am. Oh, ba Jumbo, massa, if ebber we git out o' dis, I don't go barooning no more!"

My spirits now rose wonderfully. I absolutely laughed at Ramoon's quaint manner of speaking. The revulsion of feeling was complete. Wonderful! saved again! I felt—I knew it; an inward feeling told me that once again I had escaped, almost mira-

culously, from the very jaws of death. Slowly, beautifully, the blessed light dawned on my entranced gaze. I could now dimly discern the outline of the cavern-wall, looming gray and indistinct through the faint twilight. I had no longer any doubt that it was indeed daylight, and each moment made it more certain. In a short time I could make out the wall of rock on the left hand quite distinctly. I now became aware for the first time that the stream was running like a torrent. All along the edge where the stream dashed against the sides of the canoe was white with foam. Now, aided by my eyesight, I could account for the rushing, rumbling sound.

It was the roar of the torrent, as it swept and dashed against the sides of the enormous cavity through which we had drifted. It was while we were in the centre, and when the roar was heard at once from all sides—ahead as well as behind—that it was loudest. The echoes of the vast vault through which we had passed lent it the roaring, rushing sound which had terrified us.

Minute by minute the light increased in brightness. Now we could discern each other's faces and the objects in the boat. Looking ahead, I could make out that there stood before us a wall of rock, on which the light shone more brightly. I could not understand this at first. Did the passage or channel suddenly end here? As we approached, however, I saw that here the stream took a sudden bend to the left, and at the same time the channel narrowed; this narrowing of the channel caused the torrent to rush on with greater fury. And now I awoke to the necessity of bestirring ourselves; for I saw that we were in danger of being dashed against the rocky sides of this subterranean passage.

The light was now quite good enough for me to distinguish every thing plainly.

At the distance of about three hundred yards, the stream dashed full against the barrier of rock, and,

surging, seething, and boiling, turned short round to the left.

There was imminent danger of our being dashed to pieces amidst the breakers. I seized an oar, and shouted to Ramoon to do likewise. But the current ran on with such terrific force, that I could do little or nothing ; and in a brief space we were tossing and heaving in the boiling foam. Fortunately, the furious rush of the stream against the rock caused a sort of breakwater, so that, though the boat shipped a great deal of spray, it did not get among the breakers, and in a second or so we swept round the bend, and into comparatively smooth water.

We were being borne on at a prodigious pace, and I could plainly notice the slope of the stream as it ran on.

As we rounded the bend, I cast my eyes ahead. Imagine my joy, my ecstasy, as I beheld, through a great opening, the glorious sky and sunlight. The next moment, with a rush, we were borne out into the open air, full in the bright beams of the midday sun. I fell forward and hid my face in my hands, for the sudden light completely blinded me.

I heard a tremendous shout ring forth, and loud cries in a strange tongue. Again and again the shout rang forth. Letting the light come to my eyes by degrees through my half-opened fingers, I looked up when I thought I could bear the glare of day. What a strange and glorious sight met my astonished gaze !

CHAPTER XXVIII

I REACH THE LIGHT OF DAY.

FAR as the eye could reach, I saw stretched before me fertile plains and verdant forests, shimmering and glancing in the sunlight. I could tell at once that we were far above the level of the plains ; indeed, about

half-way up the long slope of a vast mountain-chain. Hence the rapidity with which the torrent rushed on.

I could discern, far away below, the silver stream winding its way through the rich plains and grand old forests. The sun shone brightly on the clear water of the river, from which fish ever and anon bounded. The river evidently abounded in the finny tribe, and the light-blue birds like kingfishers shot across the water, hither and thither, giving utterance to their shrill cries.

Monkeys chattered and jabbered in the branches of the great trees lining the banks ; and the air was resonant with the screams of parrots and paroquets.

Before me the swift stream, now becoming narrower, filled the forest behind and around me with its gentle rippling, so different from the dreadful sound which had alarmed me in the cavern. It ran between steep banks, which seemed almost to meet and hide it at times—while at others it plunged through tangled thickets, and groves of mangrove-trees, absolutely overhanging the water. In several places it was so covered by branches of trees and bushes that we came into momentary collision with them, and my hands and face got scratched as the current bore us onward.

Away down the valley we could see the river travel like a silver line over the plain, finally lose itself in denser forest, and appear beyond as a thin thread of glistening light.

The valley itself was a pleasant wooded plain, interspersed at places with open spots of verdure, most refreshing to the eye. It appeared as though the foot of man had never trodden here, so primeval did every thing appear. The song of birds, the chatter of monkeys, and the hum of insects, mingled pleasantly with the murmur of the stream, and made up a chorus most grateful to the ear.

But there were other sounds and sights to which I have alluded, and on which I must now dwell more at length.

The first sound which fell on my ear as we emerged from the foaming mouth of the chasm was a tremendous shout, followed by wild cries—beyond all question human !

Casting my eyes on the banks of the stream, which bore us rapidly on upon its shining bosom, I saw, amid the thick brushwood and forest groves, dark forms—human forms—running along the banks, so as to keep up with the boat. There was a great number of them, and, from occasional glimpses I caught, I saw that they were nearly naked, and of a dark copper hue. What were their intentions?—hostile or friendly? At first I was in doubt; but, presently coming to an open glade, all the running copper forms prostrated themselves on the ground.

At once I leaped to the conclusion that I had nothing to fear—they held us in veneration and awe.

The course of the stream was so rapid, at times tumbling over a steep slope, almost a cataract, that there was some danger of the boat upsetting.

So I took an oar, and occupied myself in steering and guiding her as well as I was able.

We dashed on thus towards the plain for full an hour at a great pace; but then presently the slope or fall became less, the motion of the rushing water more gentle and equable. Soon it flowed with a comparatively slow motion of about three miles per hour, and also widened out considerably.

There lay now on either hand a belt of open ground between us and the forest, and along this the blacks ran, getting ahead of the boat and waiting till it came up, when they would prostrate themselves face to the ground till we had passed. Then again they would run on ahead, repeating this process continually. I had now opportunity and leisure to examine these natives of the aboriginal forests. They were most remarkable in appearance—much lighter in shade than the negroes I had seen. They seemed strong, tall, and well made, and were evidently very active.

The men were almost naked, and the women were even less covering than the men. What clothing they had, I afterwards discovered, was not cloth, but the soft inside bark of a tree, from which, suspended in front, hung a narrow strip of the skin of some wild animal. Their hair, or rather wool, was drawn out into long plaits. All of them wore a profusion of ornaments, in the way of iron, brass, or copper rings around their necks, wrists, and ancles. Over the shoulders of all the men were suspended huge, broad-bladed knives, or perhaps they should rather be called short swords; and every one carried an oblong shield on the left arm. The women were much smaller than the men, with by no means unpleasant features. Their forms were eminently graceful, and they had the smallest hands and feet I had ever seen. Such were the strange people who ran by the side of the river, shouting, prostrating themselves, and making us signs to land.

Presently I saw, about half a mile distant, a collection of huts or buildings of some kind on the left bank of the river.

Now the blacks set up a loud chant or song, which I interpreted as an invitation to land. It was certain that I must land at some time or other, so after a little consideration I determined to do so here.

They seemed friendly enough, and, indeed, to hold me in the greatest dread and reverence. To make all sure, however, I loaded both the guns with blank charges; and as I approached the village—for such it appeared to be—I gave the word to Ramoon, and we discharged them both together.

No sooner did the fire and smoke leap from the muzzles of the two cannon, and the woods reëcho with the loud report, than all the natives fell prone on their faces as if shot.

At the same moment I took the oar, and by a few vigorous strokes shot the boat out of the stream into a little creek which ran up to the village.

The next moment her bows touched the sandy shore, and going forward I seized the painter, and leaped ashore.

It was a most exciting moment : a feeling of wild exhilaration pervaded me, and a thrill shot through my frame, as my feet touched land.

Land—land inhabited by human beings—a glorious land, abounding in game and verdure, hitherto untrodden, unexplored by any white man. After all my perils—my balloon voyage of many thousand miles—my disastrous and dismal progress from the horrid valley, through the pitchy bowels of the mountain—I had again reached the light of day, and now stood on *terra firma*.

No conqueror after winning a battle ever felt such wild triumph as I then did.

Having moored the boat safely, I took my double-barrelled rifle, placed a couple of revolvers in my belt, motioned to Ramoon to do likewise, and looked round for the inhabitants.

CHAPTER XXIX.

I MAKE A SENSATION AMONG THE SAVAGES.

I HAD not been looking around me for more than a few seconds when I espied moving objects in the bushes which fringed the stream. Those, I soon perceived, were the natives, whom I had before seen following the course of the boat down the river. I observed now that they seemed to advance in a semicircle, cautiously as it were, as though not wishing to be observed. While I was yet wondering what these singular manœuvres portended, they reached the edge of the brushwood, and emerged into the open ground, which stretched from where I stood for a distance of some twenty or thirty yards only.

Then suddenly, without the least warning, a tall

fellow, having a plume of feathers on his head, rushed to the front, and brandishing a formidable weapon—half hatchet, half sword—shouted, “Amarantha ! Amarantha !” in loud tones.

I had no time to ruminate on the meaning of this, for scarcely had he ceased when the whole crowd took up the cry, and the woods reëchoed with the noise : “Amarantha ! Amarantha !”

The din was deafening : several hundred half-naked savages yelling forth this, to me, mysterious word. In every situation it was shouted forth ; in the shrill tones of women and children—the groaning accents of old men—while above all rung out the deep bass of the big black fellow with the plume of feathers.

And now, as if seized with a fit of sudden frenzy, the whole mob of savages commenced leaping, dancing, and gesticulating violently, all the while approaching and waving their weapons threateningly.

“Ramoon, look out ! they are about to attack us,” I said, in low tones, to my companion ; “when I give the word, fire into them.”

At the same time I held my double-barrelled rifle in readiness, and felt in my belt for the revolvers with which I had provided myself, and prepared to sell my life dearly if I could not save it. I, however, was by no means despairing ; I had escaped so many perils, that I trusted I might repulse the threatened attack, and at least manage to regain the boat. I had great hopes that these savages were unacquainted with fire-arms. Should such be the case, it was nearly certain they would be terribly frightened at the flash, smoke, and report.

But, despite my well-founded hopes, it was a nervous moment, and my heart beat fast as I stood, finger on trigger, prepared for the worst. Should my anticipations with respect to their being unacquainted with fire-arms prove fallacious, it seemed as though our doom were sealed : for among hundreds of savages a

few shots would be of no avail, and although two or three of their number might fall, the rest would speedily overwhelm me, and the next moment the ground would be stained with my life-blood.

And now—while I thus thought—the whole crowd made a simultaneous rush forward, the shouts merged into one terrific prolonged yell. I resolved to reserve my fire till the last moment.

Now they are almost upon me. The big fellow with the plume of feathers is leaping high in the air, brandishing his weapon within half a dozen yards—another bound, and he can reach me.

I raise my rifle and take aim at him.

“Now, Ramoon, take sure aim,” I said.

The rifle is levelled full at the savage’s breast, my finger is on the trigger—another second, and a bullet will have whistled through the big black fellow’s body.

But suddenly I let fall the gun in amazement. As though by magic, the whole scene is changed.

Where is now the leaping, dancing, shouting crowd?

Prone on their faces, grovelling in the dust.

With one accord, almost with one movement, they fell before me, as though all were suddenly shot.

What did it mean?

They had thrown aside their weapons, and now crawled humbly forward on their hands and knees. The big savage, who appeared to be a chief among them, made motions as if to invite me to place my foot on his neck.

As for the others, they kept up a continual low musical murmur, amid which I could distinguish the oft-repeated word, “Amarantha.”

While I was yet wondering at the meaning of this strange scene, the chief raised himself to a kneeling position, and, clasping his hands above his head, looked at me, as I thought, imploringly, and said these words:

“Amarantha Jango Kai.”

Now, though I was utterly ignorant of the meaning of his speech, I judged by his attitude, accents, and gestures, that he was begging a favour—perhaps praying for mercy! Yes; it must be so. These savages feared me; and the wild dance I had witnessed, instead of being a hostile demonstration, was meant to propitiate me.

I felt wonderfully relieved at this—it was an immense load off my mind; so I held my head loftily, and said in loud, commanding tones:

“Fear not, good people; I have not come to harm you.”

Then again arose a low murmur among the kneeling crowd. I could only distinguish the word “Amarantha,” which, being so often repeated, I judged was an appellation for myself.

I now motioned them to arise, saying at the same time, at hap-hazard

“Arise! Amarantha will not harm you.”

On hearing the word Amarantha, a prodigious commotion seized them. They rose to their feet, jabbered to one another, and whenever they looked towards me made a low obeisance. I saw at once that I was taken for some great and powerful being, with power, if I so chose, to destroy them.

So I resolved to make the best of this idea. I pointed to the boat which lay moored to the bank, and motioned for them to unload her. But not seeming to understand my dumb-show, I went up to the boat, and taking hold of a small barrel, lifted it ashore, and then motioned them to do likewise.

This seemed to be understood at once; and, at a word from the tall fellow, who seemed to be a chief among them, they all fell to work, unloading the boat, and placing the cargo on the land by the side.

While they were thus employed, I took the opportunity of looking around me, and thinking over my position and prospects. The village was beautifully situated, at rather less than a quarter of a mile from

the bank of the bright, flowing river. It nestled among trees and brushwood foliage of the deepest green, almost smothered and hid from man in the luxuriant verdure. As I have said, along the banks of the river, and by the sides of the little creek, was an open space of clear ground, and beyond this low bush or brushwood, which gradually merged into the forest beyond. I walked up to the verge of this low path, and, forcing my way through, found myself at a few yards from the open, in a clear space or grove, almost circular in form, and surrounded on all sides by thick bushes, except on that side facing the river. The thought struck me at once: here is an admirable place for me to collect all my property, build a hut or tent, and erect a breastwork or fortress, in case of treachery. Accordingly, I walked to the boat, and, with the assistance of Ramoon, took therefrom a tall pole, which I had intended to form a light mast, if necessary. To the top of this I fixed a small block, and bent on a pair of signal haulyards. Then I took a pick and shovel, and, digging a hole in the centre of my enclosure, planted the flagstaff firmly.

Next, I bent on our English flag, and hoisted it to the mast-head. As the folds of our glorious old ensign fluttered in the breeze, I took off my cap, and, enjoining Ramoon to do likewise, gave a hearty English cheer—"Hip, hip, hurrah!"

The savages, who were busy unloading the boat, paused, and gazed with wonder at the mast with the flag floating from the top. Doubtless they thought it some mystic emblem; for they all made a profound obeisance, and then went on with the work of unloading the boat.

Meanwhile, I took a hatchet, and commenced cutting away the brushwood in front, so as to make a clear path to the circular space, which I had determined, for the time at least, to occupy. This done, I went down to the boat, to superintend the operation of unloading. All drew respectfully on one side to

let me pass, making profound obeisances as before; and I formed the idea from their behaviour that they held me as something supernatural—to be feared and propitiated accordingly. Now, although it may seem, on the first aspect, unfair to impose on the credulity of those poor ignorant savages, nothing could possibly have suited my purpose better. Accordingly, I resolved to give them every possible evidence of my power, and at the same time to behave with the utmost forbearance and kindness, in order that they might judge therefrom how much better it was to help me as a friend, than arouse my enmity and vengeance. So soon as the boat was unloaded of all the lighter goods, I proceeded to get ashore the cannon and heavier cargo. I had some difficulty in getting them to coöperate with me for a long time, for whenever I approached close to one of them, he would shrink away in unfeigned terror, as though I were red-hot. Although it was a very good thing for them to hold me in wholesome dread, this feeling would never do; so I beckoned to me the tall chief, and held out my hand to him. He looked at it with an expression of awe, doubt, and wonder almost laughable. But, smiling at his terror, I said some few words in an encouraging tone, and, notwithstanding his shrinking back, took his hand in mine. I shall never forget the look of gratified wonder of the poor fellow when he discovered that my touch neither scorched him nor harmed him in any way.

Slowly a smile broke out on his dark features, and dropping on his knees, he placed my hand to the crown of his head. This, I take it, was a sign of unqualified submission. I raised him, and—though of course he could not understand me—again said some encouraging words. Meanwhile the crowd, who had been looking on with the utmost wonder and fear, broke into loud shouts of joy.

“Amarantha Jango! Amarantha Jango!” Such was the burden of their cries. I felt convinced that

"Amarantha" was applied to myself, and to test the truth of this idea of mine pointed to my breast, saying the mysterious word—"Amarantha!"

Instantly every one among them, including the chief, fell on their knees and touched the earth with their foreheads. Thus I was satisfied that, whatever the meaning of the word might be, I was looked upon as "Amarantha."

I now felt hungry; and having a mind to test the hospitality of these people, and how far they would be obedient to my commands, I pointed to my mouth, and waved my hand imperiously towards the village. Instantly the tall chief gave a few words of command, and with one accord the whole party ran off to the village. The chief remained behind, and seemed to ask by gestures whether I would accompany him to the village. But I had a mind to remain by my boat, and also wished for leisure to think over all the strange adventures I had passed through, and this last one by far the pleasantest of any. So I moved my hand in token of my wish to be alone, and making an obeisance as before, he quickly vanished.

Then I seated myself on the river-bank, by the side of my property; and Ramoon having by my direction filled a pannikin with rum-and-water, I took a pipe, and proceeded to indulge in a smoke, and soon fell into a deep reverie. The evening sun shone brightly in the west; the river bubbled and gurgled merrily at my feet; the wind sighed and murmured softly among the trees; the parrots and wild birds chattered in the forest; while from the village I could hear the sound of a low, monotonous, but yet musical, chant in women's voices.

It was a glorious scene; and no wonder that, lulled by the beauty and repose of all nature, I dreamed bright waking dreams of future joys and triumphs.

CHAPTER XXX.

I DINE SUMPTUOUSLY.

I WAS presently roused from my day-dream by the sound of voices approaching from the village, and rising, I saw approaching a crowd of people bearing vessels in their hands. They halted respectfully at some twenty yards' distance, as though waiting my permission to come nearer. I signalled them to approach, which they did timidly, as if still fearful I might do them an injury. When within a few paces, they laid down the viands they had brought with them; and, assuredly, hungry as I then was, no aldermanic feast could have been more tempting.

There were plantains and fish from the river baked together in earthen calabashes. Halves of fowl also baked, a curious kind of stew of most savoury odour; slices of meat of various kinds, all boiled and very tempting to the eye; and many other dishes and compounds, which I could not make out at all.

However, I was hungry, and commenced on some baked fowl, as I could not mistake the nature of that. There were several gourds full of liquid; and on trying one, I found it contained a pleasant compound, with a peculiar flavour and most intoxicating effect. This, I afterwards discovered, was palm wine, of which the natives of this part of Africa are exceedingly fond.

Having finished half a fowl, I tried some of the other dishes—the savoury-smelling stew first. The taste of this was fishy and rank to my palate, and I at once discarded it. Nor did I succeed better with the next dish. I tried a slice of meat: it was gristly, somewhat resembling calf's head in consistence, though much tougher. So I returned to the baked fowl and plantains, and made thereon an excellent meal.

As for Ramoon, he ate freely all round, tasting, and seeming to enjoy, every thing. Presently, having somewhat satisfied his appetite, he said: "Say, gub'nor, s'pose dis man we been eatin'!"

He had heard of cannibals, and now made the unwelcome suggestion. For a moment I felt a horrible suspicion creep over me, but on second thoughts I dismissed it. None of the meat before me cou'd possibly be human—the slices were too large and thick.

Afterwards I discovered that the stew was composed principally of alligator's flesh, and the slices were elephant's meat, both which are considered great delicacies.

While I and Ramoon were eating, the natives squatted themselves on the ground at a short distance, observing us and watching our every motion with the greatest curiosity. Just as I had finished, I heard a commotion and jabbering among them, and saw them looking and pointing to the flagstaff I had erected. At first I did not perceive what it was which had attracted their attention, but looking more closely, saw a small dark object moving about. A more careful examination told me it was a monkey, who was busily employed in tearing the flag I had so carefully hoisted. This fired my indignation.

The flag that's braved a thousand years
The battle and the breeze"

insulted and torn by a monkey! It was not to be borne. So, springing to my feet, I drew the bullet from one barrel of my rifle, and loaded with a heavy charge of buck-shot.

The flagstaff was some seventy yards' distance, and I felt confident of my ability to bring down the audacious ape.

Here, too, was a grand opportunity of displaying my powers to the savages, and, if they had never before seen fire-arms used, strike them with dismay

and terror. Accordingly, having loaded my piece, I walked towards them a few paces, and pointed first to the monkey—stamping my foot, and making other signs of anger—and then to my rifle. They all rose and looked wonderingly, first at me, then at the weapon I held: it was evident that they did not know the use of it—had never seen one before. So, after endeavouring by signs to indicate that they need not be alarmed, I took deliberate aim at Jacko, who was now tearing little pieces from the flag and throwing them down. They looked in breathless suspense at this, to them, incomprehensible proceeding on my part, thinking, as I afterwards learned, that I was exercising some mystic spell or enchantment.

However, having covered my game well, I fired, and down fell the monkey. I shall never forget the scene of wild confusion which then ensued.

All ran for a short distance, but the greater number, after a few steps, became so terrified as to fall flat on their faces. Cries and yells of terror and dismay rent the air, which were taken up by those in the village, till the noise was perfectly ear-splitting. For several minutes the whole of them lay without daring to lift up their faces from the ground. The tall fellow with the plume of feathers was among the first, and him I hastened to reassure in the best way in my power. I pointed smilingly to the foot of the flagstaff, where lay the dead monkey, then to my rifle and to him, shaking my head at this, as much as to say that he need have no fear.

Then I walked towards the place where the monkey had fallen, beckoning him to follow me. He did so, though with slow and uncertain steps. However, I succeeded in inducing him to walk to the foot of the mast, where he found the dead ape. Taking it up in his hands, he carried it forth into the open, and holding it above his head, called out in a loud voice:

“Amarantha ompolo Amarantha!”

Now, I had before discovered that “Amarantha”

meant myself, and judged that the word "ompolo" meant great, powerful, or invincible. Thus I got the first clue to the language of this people. All eyes were bent on me, and every voice shouted out the words after their chief. I now had little difficulty in calming their fears; and soon was surrounded by a tawny crowd, gazing with the utmost astonishment on my features, my person, my dress—not rudely, but with that sort of wondering awe with which we might regard an angel from the skies.

It was now sundown, and, feeling very tired, I resolved to sleep in the boat, as I had there plenty of sail-cloth wherewith to rig an awning to keep off the night air. So I intimated my intention by pointing to the west, where the sun had just gone down, and then again to the east, by which I meant to signify that I wished them to leave me now, and that I would see them again in the morning. Accordingly, thoroughly tired out by the fatigues and perils of the last twenty-four hours, I rolled myself up in my rugs at the bottom of the boat, and slept the sleep that none but the weary can ever hope to taste.

CHAPTER XXXI.

I STAY WITH THE HOSPITABLE SAVAGES AMONG WHOM I FELL
—I CONSTRUCT A BOAT, AND DETERMINE AFTER A TIME
TO START ON AN EXPÉDITION INTO THE INTERIOR.

THE sun was high in the eastern sky when I awoke from this, the first refreshing sleep I had enjoyed for a long time. I had gone to sleep without fear, and in perfect confidence, firmly convinced that I was safe from any attack or treachery from the natives. Nor had I reason to repent my confidence; for I found, when I landed, that a sumptuous breakfast had been already provided for me; and, so soon as I had performed my ablutions in the bright, clear stream, and stepped

ashore, a number of natives advanced, carrying clay dishes and calabashes, containing cooked meat of various kinds. Having deposited them on the ground, they withdrew, as before, to a respectful distance, while I and Ramoon made our repast.

When I had finished, taking my rifle and revolver, I advanced towards the village. The natives preceded me; while one of them, starting off at a run, soon returned with the tall one wearing the plume of feathers, whom I at once knew to be the chief or king. He greeted me in, as I suppose, native fashion, by falling on his knees, and touching the ground with his forehead. This done, he arose and walked by my side. I now, for the first time, noticed him closely. He was a tall, well-formed man, apparently of about thirty years of age. His features partook little of the character of the negro, and the expression was intelligent. In colour he was of a dark copper-tint, but much lighter than any of the others. The only article of dress he wore was a cloth round his waist, which was the skin of some animal,—a panther or leopard, so far as I could judge. He had on his wrists armlets, apparently of silver, and also some smaller rings above the ankles. His breast and arms were tattooed, otherwise his body was in nowise disfigured. Around his head, coming across the forehead, was a circlet, also of silver, and in this was placed the plume of feathers which distinguished him from all the others. I could not help admiring the graceful form and easy movements of this dusky prince as he walked beside me, and contrasting him favourably, so far as mere animal beauty was concerned, with many of the proud Caucasian race.

Arrived at the village, I found it to be enclosed by a sort of mud and basket-work stockade. We entered by a wide gate, and found ourselves at the end of a long street, about fifteen yards wide. The houses or huts on either side were very clean and neat-looking, and all quadrangular in shape. As I passed down

this street, the inhabitants crowded to the doors to gaze on me. All, however, as I passed, respectfully made obeisance ; and there was nothing at all which could be construed by the most fastidious into rudeness or incivility.

I will not dwell long here on the nature of the buildings, as I have other matter on hand to discourse about, but with a few passing words will go on.

The walls of the houses are built by driving stakes into the ground, and then interweaving with them thin strips of bamboo, while the crevices are carefully covered and lined with palm-leaves. They all had doors and windows, and were cleanly both without and within. I must confess that these things surprised me much, for the people among whom I had fallen had never seen, nor ever heard of, a white man. Bearing this fact in mind, their civilisation, and the lightness and cleanliness of their abodes, were something marvellous.

The women who came to the doors of the huts to gaze upon me as I passed were decidedly good-looking, and bore but little trace of the negro in their features. It is true the hair of both sexes was woolly ; but far softer than, and very different from, that of the coast negroes, and their descendants the North-American niggers.

The dress of the women was composed solely of a piece of cloth or calico of some kind, simply wrapped about the body, and descending from the hips to a little above the knee.

The chief, with the plume of feathers, showed me all over the village, took me to his own house, which was exactly like the others, and only to be distinguished from them by being larger, and there being two fellows—sentries, I suppose—stationed at the door with spears. By signs this amiable savage intimated to me his wish that I should take possession of his house, pointing to all the people around, and to the two sentries as much as to say that they should be my

servants. But I declined the honour, and, signifying my wish to return to my boat and property, he again accompanied me through the one long, broad street, and we reached the bank of the river without anything occurring worthy of note.

My first task was to remove all the goods with which the boat was laden up to the clear space around the flagstaff; for I resolved to take up my abode here until I had learned sufficient of the language to know where I was, and what was the nature of the country. The task was an easy one, for I had abundant assistance, and had only to point to an object, when straightway it was seized by many hands, and carried where I wished. When everything had been removed up there, I proceeded to overhaul the boat, in order to ascertain if she were in thorough repair, and then set about making arrangements for a permanent habitation.

It was fortunate I was well provided with tools of good quality, for those I saw in use among the savages were of the rudest and roughest description.

Having decided on my plan of action, I first set to work, and dug a trench all around the open space, and then within this proceeded to drive in strong stakes; the intervals between these stakes I filled with branches and brushwood, intending finally to consolidate it with stones, earth, and clay, so as to prove a formidable, if not perfect, stockade or breastwork. I had plenty of assistance in all these operations; for the natives now convinced that I did not mean to harm them, looked on me no longer with fear, but only with wonder and admiration.

My hair and clothes were incessant objects of amazement to them, and they were never tired of looking at my boots. My trousers coming down over these, they naturally thought it was my feet they saw; and the chief afterwards told me that the one thing he could not understand was, why I should have a white face and black feet.

By the evening I had completed my trench, and the stockade was so far advanced, that a few hours' work would finish that also. I left a narrow opening in front for entrance and exit, so made that it could be easily and effectually blocked up on occasion. This night I again lay in the boat, and went to sleep with a heart full of joy and thankfulness.

I had indeed reason to be thankful for my good fortune, when I considered my present condition, the honoured, almost dreaded guest of a tribe of amiable savages, with that of some day and a half previously, when, overwhelmed with horror, in pitchy darkness, I gave myself up for lost, expecting to be dashed to pieces over some tremendous cataract, or sucked into the vortex of some subterranean whirlpool.

Pleasant dreams blessed my repose, and I awoke refreshed, strong, and vigorous. So soon as I had partaken of breakfast, which, as before, was liberally provided, and waiting my pleasure, I went to work to complete my ramparts and build a hut or house.

My progress was as rapid as I could wish, for I had only to show my docile and willing friends what to do, and straightway a dozen pairs of hands set to work and did it. Thus, before evening, my stockade was completed, and the hut in the centre in a forward state. While some of the natives were finishing this latter, I, with Ramoon and another party, employed ourselves in dragging up all the cargo from the boat, including the ammunition, iron and other metals, and the two cannons. The remains of the balloon I left in the boat, carefully covered with tarpaulin, for it was as well there as ashore. Around the interior of my earth-work I caused to be constructed a terrace, or platform of earth, to within a few feet of the top. On this I mounted the cannon, and, the earth of this platform having been beaten hard and smooth, the pieces could be wheeled round to any point and fired. I also provided many loopholes for firing through, and neglected no precaution which I thought would add to the safety

of the place. In short, I intended that my little hut should be strong enough to stand a siege of many weeks, and I determined to lay in a good stock of provisions with that object in view.

The rear of this my intrenchment looked towards the village ; and here I made a small wicket in the wall, and also caused a narrow path to be cut in the brushwood leading up to it. I had no definite object in view in all these precautions and fortifying, but as I determined to remain here until I had learned the language and arranged for fresh explorations, I thought it wise to be on the safe side, for I knew not how long the people's present amiable humour might continue. In time they might cease to fear me, and might be inclined to attack me and kill me. Now for this contingency I was determined to be prepared, and feared little for the result. There was another eventuality, too, in which my preparations would be of immense use. I knew that as a rule these African tribes are continually fighting one with another ; the stronger attacking and plundering the weaker ; and the weaker in turn lying in ambush for and slaying the stronger, whenever opportunity offered.

Now, should these people remain faithful to me, and be attacked by another tribe, I was fully prepared to defend them with all the appliances which my knowledge and the weapons of modern civilisation afforded.

These, then, were my objects in surrounding myself with what I fondly hoped was an almost impregnable rampart. Nature, too, stepped in to my assistance ; for scarcely had my trench been dug to the depth of about eight feet all round, than it began to fill with water, and in the space of a few hours was full to the brink. I threw two light bamboo bridges across this, which, however, could be destroyed in a few seconds, and then they would be bold men indeed who should attempt to carry my position by storm.

In the first place, there were the two small cannons :

these could be wheeled along the platform to any position I chose, and the gunners being protected by the mud breastwork, a deadly volley of grape and small shot could be poured into the attacking force. Then, should the warriors press on and endeavour to cross the moat, a withering fire could be opened on them from the loopholes I had made. Though there were only two of us, yet as we were situated we could do the duty of a dozen men, for I had four double-barrelled fowling-pieces, three double and six single barrelled rifles, besides four revolvers, each of six barrels, and two blunderbusses.

So that we had forty-four barrels which we could discharge without reloading, irrespective of the blunderbusses, which in themselves were quite little cannon. When all my preparations were completed, I looked round with great pride on my impromptu fort, with its two cannon grinning from holes in place of embrasures in the stockade; its stores of food, instruments, arms, and ammunition, and our old flag floating proudly above all.

There was triumph in the thought that I, an insignificant individual, should be the first to hoist the glorious British ensign where it was never seen before, and perhaps but for me never would have been.

By the evening, excepting some minor details, my work was accomplished, and I was commander-in-chief of a fort flying English colours, amply provided with arms, food, and ammunition, and with a gallant garrison under my command of one soldier, namely, my faithful Ramoon.

And now, having finished my fort, and hoisted my pennant, in nautical phraseology, I moored my boat safely at a landing-place which I caused to be constructed at the end of the path leading down to the river, and well within sight and range of both rifle and cannon. I proceeded to make myself comfortable: first, I had a large palm-tree cut down, and the trunk rolled into my stockade in front of the house for a

back log to my fire; then I collected a good store of firewood, lit a big fire, and, for the first time since starting on my adventurous voyage, cooked my supper under the clear vault of heaven, with an easy mind, and without fear or misgiving. Having finished our evening meal, while Ramoon busied himself in clearing away the dishes and fragments, and boiling some water for coffee, I sat smoking, listening to the dismal howlings of the wild beasts of the forest, and planning an expedition into the very centre of this vast continent. Hitherto I had been so busied about my fort and hut, with its defences and approaches, that I had not been into the forest, which I knew to be tenanted by numerous wild beasts, from the howls, yells, and screams which made night hideous. But on the morrow, or as soon as possible afterwards, I determined to start on a hunting expedition in search of sport.

The howlings and shrill screamings I heard were those of jackals, wild dogs, leopards, and other smaller wild beasts; while occasionally I could hear above all the deep, terrible roar of the king of the forest, the African lion, who was prowling about the woods in search of some stray bullock or hapless man who should venture alone from the village. The natives kept this dreaded visitor at a distance by means of huge fires, which they never suffered to go out all night, no matter how stormy or wet the weather.

By degrees I got accustomed to this nocturnal wild-beast serenade, and fell into a train of thought and speculation as to my future proceedings. This was the plan I briefly sketched out to myself:

I would remain here among this friendly tribe until I had sufficiently mastered the language to make communication easy. I would then learn all I could about this country, the country beyond, and the tribes in the interior—in short, possess myself of as full information as I possibly could.

Then I purposed building a large canoe, capable of being mounted on wheels, and carried overland

when necessary, and starting on an exploring voyage for the centre of this great and almost unknown continent.

I purposed hunting and shooting on the way, and bringing back, if ever I returned, a vast quantity of ivory, skins, feathers, and specimens, thus making the journey successful in a commercial point of view as well as a mere adventure. I knew that this river on which we were, if it did not run into the sea, emptied itself into some other which did: now, from the small size of this stream, and from my own experience, I thought it was a mere mountain torrent, which would soon run into some slow and stately flowing river—perhaps the great Gaboon.

In this latter case, when, after descending this bright, swift-flowing stream, we emerged into the broad waters of a larger one, I would shape my course up the stream, away from the sea, and towards the interior of the country. I purposed steering as nearly as possible E. or E.N.E.—so as to penetrate into the very centre of Equatorial Africa—to the supposed and long-sought-for source of the Nile, and the vast and dimly known mountain-range called the “Mountains of the Moon.”

Then, having carefully noted down what discoveries I had made, I would return, laden with the spoils of the chase, and perhaps, after an absence of several years, would make my way back to the coast again, set sail for Old England, and give to the world an account of the wonders I had seen, the strange countries I had travelled in, and the curious tribes of natives I had met.

Such were my plans: as my story proceeds, it will be seen how I succeeded.

CHAPTER XXXII.

MAKE PROGRESS IN THE LANGUAGE, AND START ON A
GRAND HUNT.

HAVING sketched out the above brief plan of my future operations, I retired to rest, and slept away the fatigues of the day. I had nothing particular to do, having finished my fort and hut, with the exception of some details which I left to Ramoon; so I strolled into the village, resolved to make myself more intimately acquainted with the manners, customs, habits, and language of the natives.

I found that, as they got accustomed to the sight of me, and I neither did nor attempted any harm against them, their fear abated; but they did not the less look upon me with deep respect and awe, as a being who, if roused to anger, would be very terrible indeed.

I had no wish to dispel this idea, as it suited my purpose very well, which was to acquire a complete control and mastery over these people, in order that I might bend them to my purpose. Their language I found very easy, and in a few days could understand a great deal of what was said, and could ask for all I wanted. I learned the names in their dialect of nearly all objects around—such as trees, bread, fruit, meat, man, woman, water, sky, earth, canoe, spear, lion (this I arrived at by imitating the roar of the monster), jackal, leopard, and many other things. The verbs were more difficult to pick up, on account of their peculiar variations. However, in the course of a week I could converse pretty freely, with the assistance of signs.

One evening the chief, or king, to whom I had taken a great liking, asked me my name, and whence I came.

“Amarantha,” I answered; “and as to whence I come, I come from far away yonder,” pointing at the

same time to the west, where the setting sun now shone in his glory.

"Good, good! Amarantha speaks well. Rambobranda knew it, and told his people that Amarantha had come from the sky, as the wise men prophesied."

At first, with my imperfect knowledge of the language, I could not make out his meaning; but by degrees, and after much questioning, I arrived at it. I was supposed to be a great spirit come from heaven, in answer to the prayers of their wise men or fetiches. Now, it seems that shortly before my arrival they had been threatened with war by a distant and far more powerful tribe, unless they paid a large ransom in elephants' tusks, dried meat, Indian corn, skins, and other commodities, which formed their sole wealth. My poor friend, King Rambobranda, was in a terrible state at this news. It would be ruin to comply with the extortionate demands of his enemies, and yet to fight seemed equally impossible; for the others outnumbered his tribe five to one, and besides were more warlike and better armed. It was under these circumstances that the wise men held a great talk, and resolved on summoning to their aid, by the most powerful incantations, the "Amarantha," or great protecting spirit of their tribe. Their traditions said that this powerful and dreaded being appeared, when called upon, from the burning-mountain smoke, which still lazily curled; that if called frivolously, or if displeased from any cause, he would turn his fury and wreak his vengeance on those who had called him. Now, it happened that the wise men having fixed a day, the whole village went up to the mountain to implore the Amarantha to appear and aid them by the most solemn rites and incantations they knew. It was immediately after these that, borne by the current, I suddenly appeared from the bowels of the mountain.

"Amarantha has heard us!" was the shout; and from that moment I was Amarantha, their guardian

spirit. Hence their devotion, their care not to offend me, and obvious unconquerable terror on my first approach; for they believed, and continued to do so, that I was not a mortal like themselves, but a spirit in human guise, and that no man or men could stand against my wrath.

The building of the stockade, the terrible and unknown weapon—the “thunderer,” as they called my rifle—they all believed to have been brought by their spirit to defend them and defeat their enemies. Hence the joyful alacrity with which they went to work on my fortification, and the consideration with which I had been treated.

It was very strange, but on both sides things all turned out with singular fortune. On mine, for falling among them at a time when I so much required rest and aid; and on theirs, by reason of the incalculable addition to their force which my knowledge, implements, and, above all, firearms, would bring in case of an attack. Had I indeed been their Amarantha or spirit, I could scarcely have stood them in better stead.

I learned that my friend Rambobranda was the hereditary king of the tribe, and was much loved and respected. He informed me, in the course of our conversation, made up of signs and words, that he had eleven chief wives and seven grown-up daughters, all of whom he politely placed absolutely at my disposal. I declined the honour; whereupon he gave me to understand that all his warriors and hunters were at my command—I had only to speak to be obeyed.

I had now been nearly a fortnight in the village, and had made myself acquainted in the best way I could, not only with the manners and customs of the inhabitants and with their language, but also with the *fauna* and *flora* of the neighbourhood, and had noted and classified many of the shrubs and trees, as well as obtained all possible information regarding the wild beasts of the forests.

I learned that herds of elephants were in the habit of roaming in the neighbourhood, and that they were occasionally hunted for the sake of their flesh and tusks, but not often; for the sport was dangerous, and these natives were naturally indolent, and, though not cowardly, had no idea of facing danger if they could avoid it.

I have said that I formed the design of penetrating the vast unknown interior of the country to the far distant mountains, and discovering the hidden source of the great Nile river, which has for ages baffled all human efforts. It was a grand project, and well calculated to fire any one's enthusiasm. So, as I never relinquish a project once undertaken, I immediately set to work preparing for this my great expedition.

I caused a whole fleet of canocs to be equipped, all of shallow draught, so as to be able to ascend streams where there was but little depth. I also laid in a large stock of provisions, and caused each canoc to be well armed and manned with picked men.

Besides the fleet of canoes, I had constructed many rude carts of light construction, so that, should the rivers fail us, we might journey overland.

When my expedition was all ready, I put forth from the creek, and proceeded down the river.

I had an idea that this stream ran into a larger one, and that, by following this larger river up towards its source, I might penetrate very far indeed into the country. How far my conjectures were correct, the sequel will show.

We had travelled down this water highway for ten days, the stream widening at each mile we advanced, without any thing of note occurring. On the eleventh day, however, the stream widened very rapidly. I thought, from many indications, that we were approaching another and larger one, or the great ocean itself. Nor was I mistaken.

About an hour before sundown we swept slowly

along, and floated on the bosom of a mighty river, whose opposite bank we could scarcely discern, such was its width. To the north-east it seemed to stretch, far as the eye could reach, towards the mountains, till lost in the distance and the vast forest which lined its banks. I remained for some time closely examining its course with my telescope, and took no notice of a large boat approaching from the west.

“Boat ahoy!”

I nearly dropped the glass in my utter astonishment.

An English hail in an English voice! for no savage could have shouted that. I looked around, and there, not fifty yards astern, was a large boat, accompanied by two canoes. The boat was English in build, the English flag flew at her stern, and she was manned by English sailors.

It was a boat from her Majesty's brig the *Cygnets*. She was lying at the mouth of this river, at some part of the Gold Coast; and the boat had come up, in charge of a lieutenant, on an exploring expedition. The sound of an English voice, and the sight of the bronzed faces of the jolly English sailors, awakened all my love and admiration for my native country in my heart, and I resolved to return. So I turned the prow of my boat towards the sea, and, in company with the *Cygnets*' boat, started for the brig. It would take us about seven days to reach the sea, the officer told me. All the fleet of canoes followed close in our wake. I could perceive that the natives were much troubled in their minds. They talked together in low tones, and I gathered words of ominous import.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

I RESOLVE TO PROSECUTE MY EXPLORING EXPEDITION.

SLOWLY, despite my desire to return home, the love of adventure and discovery again assumed sway.

Surely there was now a chance. There was a whole tribe of savages devoted to me, and ready to do my bidding. Ordinarily, Europeans penetrating into the interior meet with hostility, ill-usage, often death, at the hands of the savage tribes ; whereas, in my case, we were numerous, powerful enough, and sufficiently well armed, to bid defiance to any tribes who might molest us, ay, and soundly chastise them, should they dare attack. It was a hard struggle, but ultimately my love of adventure and desire to explore the interior of the country prevailed.

As we proceeded down the river, the murmurs of my savage allies grew louder. They besought me in uncouth language not to leave them.

“*Amarantha Jango Kai, kalamarka—kalamarka !*” This was their perpetual cry, and meant,—“O great White Spirit, come back—come back !”

But I was reluctant to appear so vacillating and weak-minded to the officer and crew of the jolly-boat—my countrymen. The lieutenant was a very pleasant fellow ; and every evening, when we camped on the river-bank, he would spin me long yarns about his slave-chasing adventures on the coast. In return I told him some of mine, and though—fearing I should not be believed—I modified and toned down every thing as well as I could, still he could not forbear an occasional fit of hearty laughter.

I well remember, on the last evening but one that we spent together, he said to me, after inspecting my stock of arms, instruments, apparatus, and all with which I had laden the boat from the car of the balloon,—

“I say, old fellow, you’ve got a splendid outfit ; it must have cost a heap of money ! What on earth is that bale of silk for ? There are many things in that queer boat of yours I can’t make out.”

“The silk ? Oh, that was for repairing the balloon,” I replied carelessly, “in case it got torn ; indeed, I have sufficient silk to construct a small one.”

He first laughed, and then, seeing I was quite serious, stared.

"But you don't mean to say, really, that you came here in a balloon? I thought you were only joking, and spinning a tough yarn for fun."

"Indeed I do mean it, though; and deeply regret the destruction of my air-ship in the volcano."

He looked at me with a very curious expression on his face, half as though he thought I were mad, and yet blended with a sort of reverence—almost awe. And, indeed, I must acknowledge that to hear any one calmly speak of voyaging from California across the Atlantic Ocean to Equatorial Africa in a gigantic balloon was indeed a "staggerer."

At last we arrived at the inlet where lay H.M.S. *Cygnets*, of the Slave Squadron. I went on board at once, and was most hospitably received. I was conducted to the captain's cabin, and, after dining heartily, was invited to join the other officers in the gun-room. I soon discovered that I was quite a "lion," and was regarded with the utmost curiosity on board.

But though all, having heard some fragments of my wonderful history from the lieutenant, were eager to hear my adventures, I declined to satisfy their curiosity at that time, asserting that I purposed writing a detailed account of my adventures, and, some time or other, giving it to the world.

The truth was, that I did not care to be laughed at; for I saw that, though very hospitably treated, I was looked on as some wealthy madman, who had come out in a ship at his own expense, and who had either invented the story or persuaded himself that he had crossed the Atlantic in a balloon.

That night my boat lay alongside the brig, and all the canoes of my savage friends hovered around. The captain of the brig, during the absence of the jolly-boat, had received sailing orders for England, and she was to leave on the following morning.

The time came. The sailors manned the capstan;

and, to the merry music of the fife and fiddle, trotted round, heaving up the great mud-hook.

So soon as the natives understood the meaning of the stir on board, there was a prodigious clamour. They yelled and shouted, paddling all the while around the vessel, and seemingly exciting each other.

I understood what it all meant, knowing something of their language.

Their frequent and frantic shouts of "Amarantha! Amarantha!" sufficiently explained to me their meaning.

They were unwilling I should leave, and were prepared to resist it, if necessary, by force.

When the anchor was hove short, and some sailors ran aloft to loose the sails, the excitement and din grew tremendous, and almost immediately there rattled upon the deck a shower of spears. At the same time, some score or so commenced clambering up the cable.

It was evident that they meant mischief. Mingled with a horror of bloodshed on my account, the longing to explore the country came back on me stronger than ever.

The captain of the brig, running on deck, was furious at this audacious and, as he considered, unprovoked attack by a parcel of nearly naked savages.

"Beat to quarters!" he shouted. "Mr. Clifton, load with grapeshot! Marines, in the waist!"

Then was heard the beat of the drum; and the crew of the brig ran to their posts. As though by magic, the deck was in a few seconds swarming with armed men—cutlasses clashed, and ramrods rattled as muskets were handed round and loaded; powder monkeys ran backwards and forwards with ammunition; the guns were loaded and run out; the marines drew themselves up in line across the deck; and there wanted but the word for the carnage to begin. Already many of the savages swarmed on the forecastle, and all the other canoes closed nearer around the vessel.

There could be no doubt of the result, were they to n

times as numerous. One volley from the marines, backed by a rush of the brawny seamen armed with cutlasses and boarding-pikes, would certainly clear the forecastle. A broadside from the cannon would as surely sink and destroy the whole fleet of canoes.

I shuddered at the thought of the carnage which would ensue. I remembered how kind these people had been to me—how devoted they still were.

I rushed forward past the line of marines, who stood with muskets ready, only waiting the word to pour a leaden hail among the blacks, who—poor ignorant people!—were preparing to throw a volley of spears.

This I knew would be the signal for a terrible slaughter.

I gained the forecastle, held up my hand, and shouted aloud:

“Ompolo, omemba Amarantha!” which in their language meant, “Hold, and listen to Amarantha, your king!”

Instantly they fell back; the clamour ceased, and there was dead silence.

Then, in a few brief words of their language, *I expressed my determination to remain with them!*

Such a shout rent the sky! Some fell on their knees, some danced, some laughed, some shouted, and some fairly leaped overboard for joy. They all, at another signal from me, clambered over the bows, and left the vessel. Then I walked aft to where the captain stood on the quarter-deck.

“You seem to exercise a singular power over these people,” he said. “What is it you told them?”

“I have altered my mind, captain,” I said grave’y, “and have determined to remain, and explore the interior of the country.”

In vain the captain and officers tried to dissuade me; I had made up my mind, and go back I would.

When they saw I was determined, they offered me every facility. Preserved provisions, fresh meat,

clothing, blankets, powder, shot, every thing I could wish, were freely offered. The captain had on board a number of muskets,—his own property,—a quantity of hatchets, and some large, heavy guns, carrying a half-pound ball. I proposed to purchase the whole from him, and he assented—indeed, I believe he gave them to me at less than their value. Some kegs of brandy and rum I also took, and, most valuable of all, a small ship's chronometer, a nautical almanac, and a fresh supply of medicines, especially quinine—that wondrous specific against the fever. The muskets, and a fresh supply of ammunition, too, were of great use. I could now arm and drill some hundred and fifty men—a force which, backed by their companions with spears, arrows, and clubs, might almost march from one end of Africa to another, led by a skilful commander, and with the further advantage of some artillery.

And now the moment for departure has arrived. I press the hands of the kind, open-hearted sailors who had so hospitably entertained me. I step over the side into my “flag-ship,” as I called the big canoe. The anchor is hove up, the sails are loosed. and H.M.S. *Cygnets* spreads her white wings to the wind, and sets sail for Old England.

It would have been strange indeed had not a feeling of sadness come over me at that moment. When should I again set eyes on the white cliffs of Albion ; when again hear an English voice ? I was about starting on a long and perilous journey—a journey into the heart of a vast and unknown country, whose forests teemed with ferocious beasts and savage tribes. I was about pursuing my way up rivers, the lurking place of huge alligators, where the vast hippopotamus tossed and disported his unwieldy bulk ; across plains and forests where prowled the African lions and the panthers ; where the huge elephant crashed along, bearing all before him, and the rhinoceros charged madly at every living object. Then, too, there were the furious wild bulls, the wolves, wild dogs, and the

untamable hyena. I might expect to see the tall giraffe, the slender gazelle, the swift roebuck. Venomous reptiles and snakes would probably beset my path; and droves of monkeys, apes, and baboons would chatter and gibber at the solitary white forcing his way through the primeval forests hitherto untrodden by man. The dreaded and fearful gorilla, too, with great long arms, the strength of six men, the fury and look of a demon, might rush on me, and, with dreadful howls, tear me to pieces. These were my thoughts as I watched the brig sail away.

Presently I saw the sailors leap into the rigging. At the same moment the glorious British flag is dipped in salute, as a parting compliment; and then broke forth a tremendous cheer, such as can only issue from the broad chests of English sailors. I waved my hat in return—the blacks set up a yell—then I gave the word to my rowers, and they paddled up the river, followed by the whole fleet of canoes; the savages yelling, and making the air hideous with their shouts of joy and triumph.

We arrived safely in about ten days at the junction of the streams where I had met the boat of the *Cygnet*. I resolved to make this place my starting-point, and deferred all expeditions, hunting or exploring, until we arrived there.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

MY SAVAGE ARMY, AND HOW I BRIGADED IT.

It is not surprising that for a day or two after parting with my newly found friends and countrymen, and committing myself to the charge of a tribe of savage blacks, I should feel somewhat dull and melancholy. This was increased by the inactive life I chose to lead; for, as I have already stated, I did not purpose hunting or shooting until arrived at our starting-point.

Ramoon, the faithful Cingalese, who had shared with me so many dangerous enterprises, was in high spirits. It just suited his easy-going disposition. Plenty to eat, plenty to drink, and little work.

"Dis more better as de baroon," he said, showing his white teeth; "no want to catch um big whale and buffler no more. No want go down in de sea, whar de big-jaw snappin' debbil and de man-jumper lib."

Arrived at the confluence of the two rivers, I moored my fleet of canoes in a creek, and proceeded to organise the expedition, and determine on a definite plan of action.

I was well aware that in forcing my way through the gloomy forests, up the rivers, across the great, sullen lagoons, and wide plains, and chains of mountains, we should be pretty sure to meet with hostile, and probably warlike, tribes. It was necessary we should be able to give a good account of these; and, as no savage force, however numerous, can stand against firearms and *European discipline* combined, I resolved to thoroughly drill and organise my sable army. My fleet consisted of seventy canoes, besides the large one I had built, and the lifeboat.

These were manned by from six to fifteen men each, and in the following manner:

There were ten large canoes with fifteen men each—one hundred and fifty; twelve with ten men—one hundred and twenty; thirty with eight men each, ten with eight men, and eight with six men each,—in all, six hundred and thirty-eight. Then there was myself, Ramoon, and four rowers in the lifeboat; and the large canoe—my great war-vessel—was manned by twenty-five picked warriors. Thus I had an army of more than six hundred and fifty men; and might always count, considering they were acclimatised, on having six hundred fit for duty. But I by no means proposed to use all my men as warriors. So large a force, travelling through sometimes barren wastes, would consume great quantities of food. Accordingly,

I selected sixty of the most daring and skilful hunters, and made it their sole duty to provide food,—to shoot and trap game, alligators, elephants, buffaloes, antelopes,—any thing which came to hand, and was eatable. I set aside forty more as a baggage-guard, and to pitch the encampments, provide firewood, and cure the flesh of the game by smoking and drying in the sun. This was a very important office, for in such a climate meat would not keep a couple of days unless so prepared, and with great care too.

My force, then, of six hundred and sixty-nine men was thus divided:

Five hundred warriors, headed by myself, with Ramoon as aide-de-camp, sixty hunters, and forty campmen, cooks, and labourers; this left a margin of over sixty, who might be ill, get wounded, killed, or otherwise incapacitated.

And now as to my fighting-men. Of course, I placed the greatest reliance on such as I could provide with firearms. I found I had sufficient to arm one hundred and sixty, with my own stock, and the muskets I had purchased from the captain of the *Cygnét*. This force I divided into seven companies, each company being commanded by a chief, whom I dubbed captain.

Next came my artillerymen. This, also, was a very important element of my force. I had altogether eight pieces of cannon; I allotted four men and a chief to each. This took forty more of my fighting men. Then there were a hundred and eighty spear-men, who, in battle, would do good execution; and, finally, I had a reserve—a motley crew, it is true—of a hundred and twenty men, armed with spears, clubs, bows and arrows, cutlasses—any thing, in fact, they could get.

And now, to organise and discipline this force, I resolved to build a camp here,—a sort of dépôt,—and devote at least two months to drilling and getting them into a state of efficiency. I will, just for the

convenience of the reader, give a tabulated statement of my estimated force :

FIGHTING MEN.			
Armed with muskets	.	.	160
Artillerymen	.	.	40
Spearmen	.	.	120
Reserve—clubs, bows and arrows, &c.			180
Total			500
NON-COMBATANTS.			
Hunters	.	.	60
Campmen—cooks, labourers, &c.	.	.	40
Margin, for sick, wounded, &c.			69
Total			169
Grand total			669

My fleet consisted, as I have already stated, of seventy canoes, of various sizes. With regard to this latter, I was well aware that we should probably not be able to travel the whole way by water, although this was by far the pleasantest and easiest mode. I hoped to be able to travel many hundred miles by water, even if I had to go considerably out of my course for that purpose. The rivers in this country run into each other, and form a complete network at places ; so that it is often possible, when stopped by the dwindling of one, to descend and strike a branch which may lead to a great lagoon, into which, again, half a dozen other streams empty themselves. I firmly believed, however, that all the rivers of Africa—I mean the great rivers—had one common source in the centre of the continent. *I was fully prepared to find here the largest lake in the world, the source of the Nile and other streams ; in fact, a vast inland sea.* Such was my theory. We shall see, in the course of this my history, how it turned out.

CHAPTER XXXV.

I DRILL AND DISCIPLINE MY TROOPS—A GRAND REVIEW.

THE next few days were spent in making the camp, and procuring game, by my savages and by myself; in poring over the maps and charts I had procured from the *Cygnets*; making calculations as to the exact latitude and longitude, and the course we should pursue. On this latter point my mind was quite made up: I would tend constantly in an easterly direction, slightly to the south—E. by S., as a sailor would say.

And now I commenced the work of drill and discipline in earnest. I first turned my attention to the picked men I had armed with muskets. It took me a week to overcome their dread of the "fire thunder," and teach them to load and take any aim at all. This done, my next care was to get them to stand in line, march steadily, form four deep, and a few other simple manœuvres. But my greatest difficulty was when I attempted to teach them to charge in line. They would stand pretty steadily, and go through the motions of firing; but when once they understood the meaning of the word "Charge!" and that they were supposed to march on the enemy, their enthusiasm broke all bounds. They ran, jumped, marched, and howled like fiends; and in less than a minute after I had given the word, my compact regiment, standing so firmly two deep in line, was transformed into a mob of naked savages, scattered over an area of some half-mile. They got so excited that they could not stop themselves, and rushed into the woods in all directions, yelling their war-cries.

But by patience I at last overcame this, and prevailed upon them to advance at the double pretty steadily. The chief, whom I made captain of No. 1 Company, was a very intelligent man, and did much to aid me. His name was Ramjamroo: at least, that is

the best way in which I can put it in writing. He was the second chief in importance of the tribe or nation. The great chief, who wore a plume of feathers to indicate his rank, was called Ramboobranda. He, too, was both a fine-looking fellow in person and intelligent in mind. I gave him command of the artillery, subject to my supervision. He was immensely pleased at this. He delighted in picking up words of my language ; and, as he expressed himself, was king of the "big-boom thunder fires," meaning the small cannon.

What would he have said—poor untutored savage!—had he seen and heard the report of one of our 300-pounder Armstrongs ?

He fully acknowledged my authority, and never questioned in any way any thing I said or did. It might have been thought that as these people got accustomed to me, their belief in my being a spirit and their care of me would wear off. Their abject fear did, it is true ; but not their respect and admiration. They saw the skill and wisdom of my arrangements, and wondered.

But to proceed with the disciplining of my army. It was quite a fortnight before I could get my gunners to stand fire. They would go through the motions admirably—load, ram home, and train the piece ; but, when I tried a few ounces of powder only, they would scatter in dismay. I overcame their terror of the "big-boom thunderers" by beginning with very small charges, and gradually increasing them, till at last I was able to fire a shotted gun. Prodigious was their amazement when for the first time I placed the four-pound roundshot in the muzzle, rammed it home, and, training the gun, carefully fired at a small tree. The flash and report of the brass piece was followed by the crash of timber and the fall of the tree.

"*Na ganbo tonda Amarantha !*" was the shout which rent the air on this successful shot. ("Not all the world can withstand Amarantha !")

Having succeeded in training my artillerymen tolerably well, I next turned my attention to the spearmen and the reserve. With the latter I could do nothing, or next to nothing, except teach them the word of command, when to advance and retreat, and a few simple orders of the kind. The very nature of the force made it impossible they could do much good in a regular battle ; but, as a reserve, in case of disaster and loss of many musketmen, and also to gather the fruits of a victory won by the better-armed troops and artillery, they would prove invaluable. If once we could throw an attacking force into disorder—repulse them with loss—then these men, armed with clubs, hatchets, cutlasses, and bows and arrows, would play havoc among them : they would do as the Prussians did at Waterloo—kill and slay the fleeing enemy after *we* had done the fighting.

As for the spearmen, I did not expect very much from them. They could take the place of cavalry, and protect the flanks and the artillery of the army.

In about five weeks from the day when I first began drilling my sable soldiers, they were so far proficient that I resolved to give a grand review.

On the appointed morning I drew up my army in battle array on the edge of the forest, prepared to resist an overwhelming force supposed to be advancing from the river, having landed from their war canoes.

First, I threw up a light breastwork of earth and ranches ; behind this I placed my infantry, armed with muskets. I placed three cannon on either flank, and two on an eminence in the rear, so as to command any part of the field. The reserve I ordered to remain behind these and near the camp, to protect it from any straggling marauding parties of the enemy. The non-combatants I had ready with litters, made of boughs, to carry off the wounded. The spearmen I placed on the flanks ; and detailed one company of my infantry as skirmishers and scouts.

Every thing being in readiness, the mock battle

began. So soon as the enemy was supposed to have landed, I opened on him with grape and canister from the field pieces. I strictly ordered the musketmen to keep concealed, and reserve their fire. They obeyed admirably, and kept their ranks, though greatly excited by the noise of the cannonade. The enemy, being in strong force and very determined, were supposed still to press on. When within sixty or seventy yards of the breastwork, I gave the word to the musketmen to fire. And so they did, too, and with a will—loading and blazing away very well and quickly. The great difficulty I experienced was to prevent them leaping from their shelter and charging prematurely. I fear if there had been a real foe visible they would have done so before they could inflict half the damage they otherwise might have done.

At a given word the spearmen rush forward with loud shouts on either flank. This is supposed to call off the enemy's attention and confuse him. Then, after delivering another volley, the time had come. The artillery blaze forth with fresh energy—the reserve in the rear makes the air ring with shouts. The two cannon on the eminence, hitherto silent, belch forth fire and smoke, and I give the word "Charge!" Over the breastwork they go. Steady there—steady! so—the enemy's vast force is now a confused mob. They run! The cannon blaze away at the landing-place. The club and cutlass men rush down, and a terrible slaughter begins (at least, is supposed to begin), in which even the non-combatants join. The river bank is covered with dead and dying, the river itself choked with bodies, red with blood.

That is the way in which I and my army won our sham battle.

Altogether, I was very well satisfied with the behaviour of my troops, and believe that had a real enemy attacked, no matter in what force (I allude to undisciplined savages, of course), we should have given a good account of them.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

OUR FLEET IS CHARGED BY SEA-HORSES—A DISASTER—AN
ADVENTURE WITH AN ALLIGATOR.

THE following morning I and the chief Rambobranda, of whom I was very fond, went out in the forest in search of game. I had seen some birds which to me seemed like wild turkeys, and, anxious to ascertain if I was right in my conjecture, and also anticipating a dinner therefrom, took my gun, one barrel loaded with shot, the other with ball; Ramoon accompanied us, carrying a large double-barrelled rifle.

We walked full a mile up the river without seeing a living thing. I fancy the noise of the sham fight on the previous day must have frightened all the birds and beasts away. After a time we saw a few monkeys and parrots among the trees. I shot one of the former, as the blacks are very fond of the flesh; and having to subsist entirely, or nearly so, on what we could kill and snare, I did not throw a chance away. We were singularly unsuccessful on that day. Rambobranda, who carried only a bow and arrows, or rather darts, they were so small and thin—nothing but reeds with sharpened points—killed two or three birds; and towards the afternoon we turned our footsteps back towards the camp. We walked along about a hundred yards from the river-bank, following the windings of the stream. Presently I saw two large mounds of earth some distance away among the trees. They struck me as being the work of human hands. Moved by curiosity, I walked towards them; and as I came nearer, I saw that they moved with life: great red insects were crawling in and out. Going closer still, I saw that they were gigantic ants, red, and, I should think, quite an inch in length. The mounds were most artistically formed. Galleries ran around them, and there were many large holes like gateways, through which I could see into the interior. I no-

ticed, too, that the ground all about where I stood was full of holes, but did not at the time suppose that these communicated with the clumps. It was a curious sight; and after watching it for some time, called to Rambobrandta to join me. When he came up, I pointed out the ant-hills to him. He gave vent to a sudden exclamation, and motioned me to come away, moving off himself rapidly.

"All right," I thought; "I'll just wake those gentlemen up a bit first."

I took up a large stone lying at my feet, and, aiming carefully, pitched it right in the centre of the largest. There was a sudden cessation of all motion. The great red ants seemed to be peering out and listening, to discover what was the matter. Then I saw some on the outside begin running about; and in a few seconds there was a prodigious confusion—such a rushing to and fro—the whole heap swarmed with them. While I was yet looking in amazement, I felt an intensely painful bite on the leg, and saw, to my horror, that the ground around me absolutely moved with them. Every inch was covered, and still they came rushing up in thousands out of the holes. Rambobrandta called loudly to me to run. I was not long in following his example, for he at once started off after warning me. After running a few yards I stopped, thinking, of course, that I was safe. I was, however, soon undeceived. Several very painful stings on the hands and face caused me to start running again; and I now found, to my horror, that the whole air was full of these pests. They were flying ants!

Rambobrandta shouted to me loudly to follow him. He made straight for the river, I following, smarting with pain, and at times scarcely able to prevent myself from crying out. Arrived at the bank, Rambobrandta at once leaped in. I, almost driven mad by the pain from the stings of these venomous insects, quickly followed his example. Standing in the water

up to my neck, I was barely able to keep off the tormentors by beating and splashing the water with my hands. For more than an hour these relentless little wretches swarmed around us in myriads and myriads, at the time I thought they would keep us there till we died of exhaustion. Rambobranda told me that it would be madness to think of leaving the river till they had gone—we should be quickly stung to death. At last, however, they began to disperse; and when the air was clear, we emerged from our watery shelter. I did not for some time understand the magnitude of the danger we had escaped. He informed me that frequently wild bullocks and deer were stung to death. In fact, if there were no water near, escape was almost hopeless; for these little brutes are as vindictive as they are venomous, and fly far more swiftly than a man can run. There was another danger we escaped too, which I did not think of at the time. Had there been any alligators at that particular spot, we should have been compelled to choose our mode of death—whether to be crunched up in their huge jaws, or stung to death by the venomous ants. Since that day I have never disturbed an ants' nest.

On our arrival at the camp, Rambobranda at once gave some orders to some of the savages, and a score or so of them started up into the woods; meanwhile, we occupied ourselves in bathing our stung faces and hands with water. The stings were excessively painful, and my face rapidly began to swell, till, in less than a quarter of an hour, I was almost blind. At the expiration of that time, those whom the chief had sent into the woods returned, bringing with them some small leaves, like those of the oak. These were quickly pounded up in a mortar with cocoa-nut milk, and then applied to our hands and faces. Marvellous was the relief! In a very few minutes the pain subsided, and the swelling also went down; so that in a few hours, but for a little soreness and the red marks

where each ant had inserted its sting, there was no trace of the painful visitation. I could not help thinking, though, that this adventure did great harm. *It damaged my prestige.* Hitherto they had looked on me not only as invincible, but as invulnerable. It was certainly derogatory to the dignity of the great Amarantha to be nearly stung to death by ants, and forced to seek ignominious shelter in a river.

The next morning I gave orders to break up our camp. All the game which the hunters had secured had been dried ; and as we had completely cleared the neighbourhood of living things, or scared them away, it was necessary we should move on for that, if for no other reason. So, every thing having been placed on board the canoes, I gave the signal ; and leading the way with the great canoes of Rambobranda abreast, we started up the river. Seated in the stern-sheets with Ramoon, rifle on my knee, I kept a bright lookout for a shot at sea-cows, alligators, or whatever might turn up.

It was an extraordinary scene. The broad, slowly flowing, sluggish river, fringed with reeds, in which, I doubted not, lurked numerous alligators ; the grand old forest, dark, sombre, and gloomy ; the picturesque canoes forming my fleet, with their dusky crews, who, all the time they rowed, kept up a monotonous shout.

At the head of so formidable a force, although only savages, I felt every inch a king. I had lighted a long reed pipe, filled with mild tobacco, and soon sank into a pleasant reverie. I thought of all my past adventures, and of the marvellous good fortune which had placed me, a mere youth, at the head, not of a small body of hired servants, with which most travellers are forced to be content, but of a large body of armed and disciplined men. Then, from the past, my thought flew onwards to the future. What triumphs might not await me ! I looked with a feeling akin to awe at the great mountain-ranges in the far

east, and wondered what lay beyond them. Unknown tracts of lands, unknown tribes, perhaps cities and nations never dreamed of. I consulted my chart, on which I had pricked down our proposed course. I followed it up winding rivers, through the districts marked "Cannibal tribes," "Fann tribes," "Omango tribes," "Unknown tribes," till at last the track I had marked out reached a great blank space marked "Unexplored."

Unexplored! What wonders might not exist in that vast central district! Perhaps unknown animals and plants, a new *fauna* and *flora*, new races of men.

There were strange traditions among my people of the country beyond the hills. Rambobranda would point with his finger, and, half in broken English, half in his own tongue, would say, "Much big country there; much big peoples. White mens and woman plenty—large." And he would point to a spot half-way up the stem of a palm tree, twenty feet high at the least. I gathered from him and several of the more intelligent chiefs that a tradition had been handed down from their forefathers to the effect that far away beyond the hills there existed a nation of giants—not black men, but white; and that, farther still, there was another people of equally gigantic size, but with skins like wild beasts' covering the whole body except the face.

Many, many years ago, he said, a prisoner from each of these people had been brought to their country. He could not explain how or where they were taken, but narrated positively the fact. Rambobranda's grandfather, who lived to a very great age, had said he could remember them. That the one with skin like a beast had claws, and could climb trees; and that the other, though very large and strong, was very gentle.

Could he mean by the one with skin like a beast and claws, the great gorilla, that hideous mockery of man?

It then occurred to me to ask the question; but he answered in the negative decisively. There used to be gorillas in his country, but he drove them away, he said.

Then he talked of another animal, large as the elephant, very swift, and with a great horn on his head.

Did he mean the rhinoceros? I asked. "Oh, no; plenty more great—more long legs—run more quick—got smooth skin, with hair; not like rhinoceros."

Could he mean the unicorn? Was it possible that this animal was not fabulous, but really existed in the interior?

These, and other extraordinary tales, furnished me with plenty of food for thought and speculation. I was again buried in reverie, when an exclamation from Ramoon aroused me. He was pointing with his finger to a small inlet, surrounded with tall reeds. I could see a moving object among them—a huge dark body. I rose, and signalled to the fleet of canoes to row cautiously, and directed my boat towards this inlet, telling the oarsmen to paddle very gently.

I could not discern what animal it was, but from its great bulk I thought it must be either an elephant, a rhinoceros, or hippopotamus. When within about forty yards, I ordered them, in low tones, to cease paddling. They did so, and the boat shot slowly on by its own momentum. I could hear the great beast splashing about in the mud among the reeds, and catch occasional glimpses of its body. I carefully loaded the great duck-gun, which carried a ball over a pound in weight; then, resting it on the gunwale of the boat, I waited for an opportunity. Looking behind me, I saw that some twenty of the canoes had approached quite close. I motioned to them to stop, and again looked out for a chance. Presently I got one. I saw fully half of the huge black body of what I thought, at first, to be an elephant. It was too tall for either rhinoceros or river-horse. "Bang!"

The great bullet sped on its mission. I heard its dull thud as it plunged into the beast's carcass. Then followed a terrible roaring and splashing in the water. The roaring was taken up almost instantly by many other beasts of some kind; then there was a great splashing, as of a regiment of horses galloping through a field; and the next instant hundreds of dark bodies plunged into the river and made straight for us.

They were river-horses.

I fired both barrels of my fowling-piece, which lay close by my side, in the hope of scaring them.

Our peril was extreme—they appeared determined to attack us. Just, however, as they reached my boat, they all dived; and I congratulated myself on our escape. I was looking towards the reeds, where the wounded animal was still splashing and roaring, when loud cries from the fleet of canoes attracted my attention. Turning round, I saw an extraordinary sight. The canoes were agitated and tossed about, as though in a heavy sea. Several were upset; and I could see the crews struggling in the water, and among them the huge black bodies of the river-horses. They had risen right in the centre of the squadron; and the result was what I witnessed. After about a minute of terrible confusion, the splashing subsided, and we hastened to assist the overturned canoes. There were seven in all, of which two were stove in and sunk. These two were laden with dried meat, which was of course irretrievably lost, as was much of the cargo of the other five. Unfortunately, too, three men were missing—either drowned or killed by the infuriated and frightened herd. It took us an hour to right the five boats and put all in order again.

I resolved to take warning for the future, and never fire from the river at a herd of hippopotami on the bank. These animals when alarmed invariably take the water, and in their rage, fear, and fury are highly dangerous. I do not know whether it was by

design or accident, but on this occasion they rose right in the centre of the canoes, upsetting some, and creating great danger and confusion.

The thought struck me, Suppose they had upset the canoe in which was stored nearly all the gun-powder? That would have been a disaster indeed; and, to prevent such an occurrence, it behoved me to devise something. I had placed it all, or nearly all, in one canoe, to guard against danger from fire, as my savage friends on every possible occasion indulged in smoking their reed pipes.

Of course, fire was a calamity to be carefully guarded against; but seeing the absolute necessity for powder, and the impossibility of replacing it should it be destroyed, it was needful also to guard against damage by water. I determined at all risks, then, to divide my store of powder-kegs. This measure, however, I could safely leave till we camped on shore for the night.

Meanwhile I felt anxious as to the hippopotamus I had shot; and, having seen all safe, and regained from the river as much of the cargo of the overturned canoes as possible, I directed my boatmen to row towards the shore, and, gun in hand, stood in the bows, ready to leap out. I had little difficulty in finding the place where the great brute lay. In his dying agonies he had rolled over and over to all appearance, and the reeds were all crushed and trampled down, and the mud red with his life-blood. He lay on his side, quite dead—a tremendous monster. Even as he lay thus in death, his huge carcass was as high as my waist. I advanced close to him, but had scarcely done so when I stood aghast with horror.

For a moment my presence of mind deserted me, and I thought I should fall. Fortunately, however, I recovered myself.

What is it that caused this terror on my part? the reader doubtless asks.

Just as I approached the body of the sea-horse, and as I touched him with my foot to assure myself

he was quite dead, another and far more terrible monster burst on my astonished gaze.

An enormous alligator slowly thrust up his head, and, crawling over the dead body of the hippopotamus, made for me. Its terrible eyes glared fearfully. Its great mouth opened and shut, showing two rows of terrible teeth; a fetid, thick vapour came from its hideous throat, and this it was, perhaps, which caused in me a momentary feeling of sickness and faintness.

I staggered back, but, fortunately, recovered my nerve sufficiently to raise my gun. I took as steady aim as I could, though I fear my hand trembled a good deal. Bang!—bang! two reports in quick succession. Both bullets entered the monster's opened mouth; one passed through the brain, and after a few struggles there lay before me a dead hippopotamus and alligator, the first wild beasts I had slain.

The shot and my shouts brought Rambobrand, Ramjamroc, and several of my blacks to my side. Great was their admiration and astonishment when they saw the two dead monsters.

"*Amarantha! Ompolo Amarantha!*" was the shout, and now I knew that I stood higher than ever in their estimation. The affair of the flying ants was forgotten, and I was again their invincible White Spirit.

We cut up the bodies, and loading some canoes with the flesh, proceeded on our voyage.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

WE PROCEED UP THE RIVER.

THAT night we camped on a large island in the river, mooring the boats all around it. I always adopted this course when possible, for the sake of safety and convenience. With some of the crew sleeping in the canoes moored around, it was impossible to be attacked unawares, and we could repose in perfect security.

In the morning I turned my attention to the gun-powder-barrels. I fancied I had hit on a scheme which would insure them against damage by water. It would occupy some time in the carrying out; but there is much truth in the old adage, "More haste, less speed." I had noticed, in some of my excursions, a kind of fir-tree, from which there exuded a thick black resinous substance—a sort of resin, or pitch. Now, it struck me, that if we could collect a quantity of this, and melt it in the earthen pots my people used, it might, when spread over the powder-barrels, prove perfectly waterproof. At all events, I resolved to try. So, directly after we had cooked and eaten our morning meal, I sallied forth to search if I could find among the trees on the island the particular sort which exudes this resin. Fortunately they abounded there, and in an hour or so we had collected several pounds. It stuck together in a thick glutinous mass, and if it could not be softened by heat, it would prove useless for my purpose. Now, I had had some experience of resins and such substances, large quantities of which I had used in making varnish for my great balloon; and I fully believed that if this stuff were melted, boiled, and then allowed to cool, it would harden into a substance like pitch. It turned out as I had expected, and, in the course of the day, we melted and poured out to cool in other vessels some twelve pounds. When cool, I again melted a small quantity, and applied it to one of the smaller powder-kegs and suffered it to dry on. By evening it was hardened, and there was an impervious coat of this substance all over the keg. In order to test this fully, I threw the powder-keg into the river, and after allowing it to float about for some quarter of an hour, recovered it, proceeded to open it, and inspect the powder. It was perfectly dry, and not damaged in the slightest degree by the water. The same evening I caused the whole quantity to be melted, and treated all my stock of powder in the same way. Nor did I forget to lay in a good store of this useful resin for future use.

This may seem a trifling matter of detail. But to my mind, remembering the risk I had run of having all my powder destroyed, it was a matter of great importance.

The next day we proceeded on our voyage, and camped again, after travelling some seventeen or eighteen miles. We journeyed on thus for ten days, nothing of importance occurring. Every morning at daybreak I despatched hunting parties to scour the country along the banks of the river in order to keep up the supply of game. For a time our hunters met with good success, and we were enabled to subsist without trespassing on our stock of dried meat and other provisions. I was resolved that this reserve supply should not be touched except as a last resort. Having between six and seven hundred mouths to feed, I was well convinced of the importance of this, and strove to increase the stock if possible.

During our progress we had passed by several villages of more or less importance, the inhabitants of which did not molest us, merely thronging the banks and gazing in stupid wonder at the fleet of canoes, headed by the large one, containing Rambobranda, warriors, Ramoon, and some dozen oarsmen. Resolved to give evidence of our power, so as to overawe all opposition, as we passed each village I caused the cannon and muskets to be fired. This certainly had the desired effect; for while some of the savage tribes threw themselves flat on their faces, others scampered away screaming with terror. There were none who showed the least disposition to dispute our free passage.

But we now reached the territory of a very warlike and cruel tribe, and, in the course of a day or so, should have to pass by the principal town; which, I learned from Rambobranda, was situate on both sides of the river. The chief or king of this tribe was, by nature, most cruel and bloodthirsty, and never allowed passage through his dominions, except at the price of an enormous passage fee. His name, I was informed, was

Mocumbra Bogo, and he was by disposition cruel, relentless, warlike, and avaricious. The city numbered, I learned, some seven thousand inhabitants, of whom at least a third were warriors and Amazons, who formed the king's body-guard.

Rambobranda expressed considerable concern at the prospect, and gave it as his opinion that if I refused whatever ransom he demanded, we should be attacked by this truculent savage with all the force he could command; and he had little doubt he could assemble an army of full five thousand to give us battle.

"Was there no way to avoid the city?" I asked.

He replied, that we should have to make a *détour* of about forty miles through the forest, and, of course, be compelled to leave our fleet behind.

This was out of the question; so, after some consideration, I resolved to force a passage at all hazards. I had the best possible reasons for so determining, one of which was the following:

For several days the supplies of game had been getting short, till, at last, as we approached the savage city, my hunters did not kill enough to supply one-third of my force. Reluctantly, then, I was compelled to fall back on my reserve store. But on the other side of the town, distant about fifteen miles, there was a tract of forest teeming with animal life. This consisted of a narrow belt of wood and jungle, standing along the river bank for some twenty miles. Beyond this, again, there was a tract of swampy land almost bare of trees or living things; beyond this, no one could tell me what there was. The most learned and well-informed of the chiefs were here at a loss. No one from their tribe had ever passed through the territory of this Mocumbra Bogo; and all which they told me they had learned from tradition only. But they were unanimous on one point, and that was, that the dismal swamp extended for a great distance beyond the fertile tract. So I resolved that, before attempting to ~~pass~~ through these sterile swamps,

I would first scour the whole country for game, and lay in a stock for future use, at least treble what I had before. My programme was as follows: to march boldly with a large escort to the city, demand an interview with the bloody-minded savage who ruled there, and express my determination to travel through his dominions—peaceably, if possible; if not, by force of arms. I did not doubt my ability to inflict signal chastisement on this warrior if he should dare dispute my passage. I had great confidence in the skill and bravery of my troops, and greater still in the artillery and firearms.

Once having defeated the sable tyrant, I could march boldly along by the river bank, covering the fleet from attack, and penetrate into the region where wild animals abounded. We could progress slowly through this, killing and capturing every thing we came across in the way of game. Buffaloes and giraffes abounded in this district, I heard, besides hippopotami, elephants, and many descriptions of antelopes and deer. There were jackals, hyenas, wild dogs, and many large birds we had not hitherto met with. I doubted not that, by taking a fortnight to scour this tract teeming with animal life, I should enjoy splendid sport, and largely increase my stock of dried meat.

It was sunset when we arrived within sight of the savage king's capital. It was entirely composed of bamboo huts, thatched with leaves mixed with mud; it was surrounded, too, by a mud wall, which the worthy Mocumbra Bogo, doubtless, thought quite impregnable. I, however, had a very different opinion, and laughed inwardly at the devastation my field-pieces would make in the miserable fortification.

Our flotilla was at once observed, and I could see messengers rushing about in all directions. Some started off into the open country at full speed, doubtless to call to the king's aid all his warriors. The mud wall was crowded, too, by hundreds of nearly naked

warriors ; and, by the aid of my glass, I could discern a regiment of women—the celebrated Amazons, of whom I had heard so much. These, I was informed, were fiercer and more terrible than the men in battle. They were sworn to perpetual celibacy, and any violation of this oath was punished by a horrible death. They were cruel, and utterly reckless of their own lives ; and a small body of them had often been known to plunge headlong into ten times the number of their enemy and perish, overwhelmed by numbers, shouting and screaming like she-demons—which, by the way, they much resembled.

That night I set my labourers to work, and threw up an intrenched camp along the river, on the most commanding positions of which I mounted my cannon. The rest I lined with musketmen, and drew all the canoes together into a creek, which I fortified in such a manner as to be secure.

It was midnight by the time we had completed these defensive preparations. We could hear a tremendous din within the town ; shouts, cries, yells, and the sound of uncouth instruments made night hideous. I guessed that the king had assembled his army, and that they were celebrating some superstitious rite in anticipation of the morrow. The noise and uproar lasted all the night.

In the morning, shortly after sunrise, I mustered my forces and harangued them.

“ Chiefs and soldiers—glorious warriors of a great tribe !—your white king, Amarantha, is about to demand passage through the dominions of the tyrant Mocumbra Bogo, and, if it is refused, lead you to victory. Sable warriors with lions’ hearts ! your king depends on you, and promises that if you stand by him the savage enemy shall be swept away like dust before the whirlwind ! ”

I made my speech short and to the purpose, and at its conclusion there went up a great shout to the sky. Then the black king Rambobranda and the chief Ramamroc addressed them in long and flowing speeches.

These ceremonies over, I marshalled my troops, manned the defences, and prepared, with a select band, to march against the town. I drew up ninety men armed with muskets, and brigaded them with the same number of spearmen. This force I divided into three companies of sixty men each. Of one I took the command myself, Rambobrand and Ramjamroc of the others. I took also twenty artillerymen and four of my eight cannons. Two of these I placed on either flank of the front column, which I commanded in person. The other two protected the flank and rear.

Having marched from our camp, I exercised my little army for an hour, and more particularly devoted my attention to making them "form square" rapidly with the cannon in the centre. This manœuvre I resolved to put in practice if attacked suddenly ; then, by quickly causing the ranks of the hollow square to open, I purposed pouring a shattering volley of grape-shot, close the ranks again, and receive the charge by a quick and close musketry fire, if the enemy should still rush on, which, however, I did not believe they would.

Having practised them till I thought they were perfect in this simple evolution, I gave the word and marched boldly across the plain towards the city with this force of nearly two hundred men, leaving the rest to garrison the camp, and as a reserve. I gave instructions that if by any chance we were hard pressed, the chief who remained should come forth to our assistance with all the fighting men and the other four cannons.

Arrived within a hundred yards of the mud wall, I sent Ramjamroc, who knew the language, as an envoy. I told him what to say, and watched him as he boldly approached the mud wall, which was thronged by thousands of the enemy. I could just hear his voice as he shouted out what I told him, but could neither hear the words nor the reply.

This message was as follows :

“This army of warriors, commanded by the great white spirit Amarantha the Invincible, demanded free passage through the dominions of the great king Mocumbra Bogo, with all his goods and canoes ; and that if this reasonable request were not promptly granted, Amarantha would proceed to destroy the city by means of the ‘great boom-thunder fires.’ ”

He returned with the answer in a few minutes. It was to this effect : that King Mocumbra Bogo laughed to scorn Amarantha and his army, and did not fear the strange weapons ; and that his army could only pass by giving up half of what they had in arms, ammunition, goods, and treasure.

Such a demand was preposterous. So I resolved to strike a vigorous blow, knowing that vacillation and hesitation would be imputed to fear. I had no wish to slaughter these poor wretches if it could be avoided, but was determined, at all hazards, to proceed. To have adopted half-measures would not have been humanity, and would have caused a greater loss of life at another time. Still, I resolved to see if I could not frighten them away without killing any.

I led my forces to within fifty yards of the mud wall, mustered them in a long line, and causing the ranks to open, placed the four cannons at these gaps ; I myself trained them at the mud wall and the ground in front, aiming low so that I might destroy it, and cause confusion by the mud and stones flying about, without killing or seriously wounding any of the savages.

Then I gave the word. The cannon belched forth, and the battle, or rather siege, began. We were just within spear-shot, and many of these were flying about. Several of my men were slightly wounded, so I resolved to make a short fight of it if possible. At once there arose a dreadful din ; my warriors hooted and yelled like incarnate fiends—the fierce Amazons responded with shrill shrieks—and above all was heard the boom ! boom ! of the cannon, and the rush of the balls as we loaded and fired.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

POISONED ARROWS—AN AMAZON—SLAVE GIRLS—INTERVIEW
WITH MOCUMBRA BOGO.

I, WITH my brave troops, carried the enemy's defences by assault. I kept up the fire of the field-pieces on the mud wall for some ten minutes, and then ceased. A cloud of dust from the dry mud into which the shot played for a time obscured the wall and its defenders. I could still hear their shouts, however, and the beating of a sort of drum, which concourse of sounds created a most awful din. When the smoke cleared away, however, I saw that the enemy had deserted the ramparts, and that there was a great breach some twenty yards wide. By and by, gathering courage, I suppose, from the fact of few of their number being wounded (owing entirely to my forbearance), they again swarmed up on the top and commenced throwing their spears and shooting little arrows. Three of my men were wounded by these latter weapons—they immediately threw down their arms, and, spite of all I could do, rushed to the rear. One arrow passed through the sleeve of my coat, but did not wound me. When Rambobranda saw this, he ran up full of concern. At the moment I was engaged in marshalling my force for an immediate advance, and had just given orders to the artillerymen to take up a position in our rear, in case the enemy should make a sudden charge, and my troops become lost.

"I am not hurt," I said to the chief, and to convince him, pulled out the arrow, which still stuck in my sleeve, and threw it down. But he was not satisfied—wished to pull up my sleeve and look for himself. I resisted until I heard the word *poison* (for I was now tolerably well acquainted with the language); then I knew the terrible nature of these insignificant-looking darts. And Rambobranda explained to me that the arrows were dipped in the juice of a plant which grew

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in the woods, and that wounds from them involved almost certain death. Need I say how thankful I was that I had escaped even a scratch! But at the same time my heart swelled with rage. To my English mind such a mode of warfare was repulsive in the extreme. I had intended to reserve firing a volley of musketry, which I knew would be most destructive among the crowded ranks of the enemy, till the last; but now all thoughts of forbearance vanished, and I gave the word to fire.

My savage warriors were already wild with excitement and impatience, and the words were hardly out of my mouth when a rattling volley was poured in: and cries and yells, far different in tone from the defiant ones before heard, told that the musketry instruction I had given my men had not been thrown away.

A few seconds only had elapsed when another volley was poured in by the rear-rank men over the heads of the front line, whom I had taught to fall on their knees immediately after firing.

Again the shrieks and groans told that the volley had taken effect. I myself was now greatly excited. There is nothing I know more inspiring than the quick "rattle" of musketry. The roar of cannon is grand—awful; but it has not the same effect on the feelings as infantry fire. After a few volleys, even veteran troops sometimes lose their steadiness, and burn to try the fierce ordeal of a charge. On my troops the effect was irresistible. I believe, if I had not given the word, they would have broken their ranks, and rushed on pell-mell to the breach.

But I no longer judged it necessary to delay the assault; so, seizing my cutlass, I ran to the front, shouting, "Follow me, brave warriors! *Charge!*" On we went at a run. I scarce know how I passed over the interval between where I stood and the mud wall. The ground seemed to fly beneath my feet, the yells of my men rang in my ears, and I knew they were close behind me. Without pausing to look back,

I rushed over the pile of dirt and rubbish at the breach, and was inside the miserable fortification in a second. The moment I leaped down, I found myself confronted by one of the enemy's warriors, armed with a short piece of iron,—half knife, half sword,—a spear and shield slung over the back, and a club in the other hand. I was greatly excited, and, cutlass in hand, rushed at the figure. When quite close, however, I suddenly halted. It was a woman—one of the king's Amazons. Instinctively I turned the point of my sword; my English notions would not allow me to attack a female. My forbearance was rewarded by a blow from her club, which knocked me down. Then she rushed at me. Doubtless my chivalric scruples would have cost me my life, for I was too much stunned for the moment to defend myself, when there came a wild rush of my men, and the next instant the fierce Amazon lay transfixed by several bayonets. I rose to my feet, wiped the blood from my face, and looked about me. In front was a long, broad street, with a forest of huts on either side. Already my half-drilled savages had lost all formation, and were beginning to disperse, shouting and yelling frantically. The excitement of the charge had been too much for their steadiness, their native habits prevailing over the discipline I had striven to impart. They did not stay even to load their muskets; and I believe, had I not succeeded in stopping them, would have scattered about the town, and very likely fallen victims to their own folly and the fury of the numerous enemy.

Fortunately, however, I succeeded in arresting them, and drew them up in something like order. But it required all my authority to do so. Their glaring eyeballs and heaving breasts betrayed the wild, savage spirit which raged within. When I had steadied them a little, I ordered them to clear away the rubbish, in order to make a passage for the small cannons, on which I greatly depended. This occupied

some quarter of an hour; and while it was being done, I walked forward with a dozen men to reconnoitre. I was very cautious, and as we passed down the street looked carefully in every hut we passed, for fear of an ambuscade. But not a living thing was to be seen: it appeared as though we were in a deserted town. Presently, however, I saw an object crawling along the ground in the centre of the road. At first I thought it was a pig, or some small animal; but as it got nearer, I discovered it to be a man. I pointed him out to Rambobranda, who at once said in English (he was very fond of sporting what little of the language he had picked up, was my savage friend), "King—he very frighten—he make him lie down." By this he meant that our enemy had experienced sufficient of our powers, and was willing to come to terms. The envoy—for such he was—crawled up to our feet, muttering some words I could not understand. Rambobranda could, however, for he spoke to him, which caused him to rise. He was a tall, strongly built savage, entirely naked, with the exception of a short apron of some skin ornamented with feathers. He and Rambobranda conversed together for some time, and then the latter, turning to me, spoke to the following effect:

"The king of this tribe says he is sorry he made a mistake; the White Spirit and his people are welcome. He invites you to his house, and will kill a hundred slaves in your honour."

I expressed my disgust at such cruelty, and told Rambobranda to tell the envoy I would take time to consider my answer; the king could send again presently. Rambobranda conveyed this to him, and off he started back at a run. Then I returned to the breach by which we had entered, and found that the mound of rubbish had been completely levelled, and the four cannon dragged inside. They had dragged off the dead of the enemy, and thrown them into an empty hut, and were doing the same with the un-

fortunate wounded, when I interfered. When I expressed my intention to Rambobranda of returning to the camp for instruments, medicine, and such like to alleviate their pain, he expressed unbounded surprise. He was as humane a savage, for a savage, as I had ever met; but so strong was the force of habit, that it seemed to him the height of absurdity to care for the wounded enemy. In all savage tribes in that part of Africa it was the universal custom to kill the wounded on the spot.

I found my baggage guard in a tremendous state of excitement. They had seen us charge triumphantly into the breach, but did not know the result of the fight inside. They had deserted their posts, every man Jack of them, and as they saw me approach with Ramjamroc, executed a wild and grotesque dance of triumph outside the camp. Spite of my annoyance at this breach of discipline, I could not help laughing at the capers they cut. The chief, Ramjamroc, on the other hand, looked gravely on, and informed me that, in his opinion, it was very fine.

This ceremony over, they crowded round us for the news. Ramjamroc indulged them with a speech, which, by the applause it elicited, must have been highly satisfactory. Before returning I again surveyed the impromptu encampment, and placed a larger number in the rear, which closely adjoined a dense thicket of brushwood. I enjoined great vigilance, for I knew not what might turn up. The chief I left promised faithfully to see that watch was kept night and day, and I returned to the town somewhat reassured.

Having attended to the enemy's wounded as well as I was able, I prepared to march in triumph to the king's house. I myself, with half the force, went first; Rambobranda in the middle, in charge of the four guns which had done us such excellent service; and Ramjamroc bringing up the rear. It was soon known that peace had been arranged, and the people

of the town began to return to their houses. They gave us a very wide berth, however, peeping out timidly from behind the mats, which served as doors.

The king's house was situated in a large square in the centre of the town. It was a long, low building, with neither doors nor windows; mats served for walls, and were rolled up or lowered as occasion required. I drew up my men in the centre of this open space, and looked around. The king's house occupied the whole of one side of this square; while the three others were filled up by huts of various pretensions. I knew the large one was that of the king by the guards who stood in front, motionless as statues. Presently the matting was rolled slowly up in front, and there was a great clanging of discordant instruments, and this puissant monarch—my defeated enemy—stalked forth.

A girl on each side of him held an umbrella over his majesty's sacred head; a crowd of women, naked to the waist, following in his rear.

My gaze rested for a moment on the truculent savage whom I had brought to reason, and then fell on the two girls—the umbrella-bearers. I was at once struck by their dissimilarity in form and feature to the other inhabitants of the town. They were fairer in complexion, more gracefully made than the other women I had seen, and their faces had nothing of the negro type.

The girl on the left hand of the king especially attracted my attention. She was tall and well proportioned; and had I not been aware of the precocity of young females in this country, I should have thought her a woman of two or three and twenty. The fact, as I afterwards learned, was very different; she was, in reality, less than sixteen years of age. Strange to say, her hair was neither woolly nor quite black; and I at once came to the conclusion that she could not belong to this nation.

Turning to Rambobranda, who was close behind

me, intending to ask him if he knew to what nation she belonged, I noticed that he seemed as surprised as myself.

"What tribe do these girls belong to?" I asked.

"I know not. They are slaves, and have not been taken in battle, but purchased. There is a tradition that, far away beyond the west mountains, there is a nation of tall people, with straight hair and brown skins. These may be two of them."

I forgot at the moment that my vanquished enemy might understand the language in which I spoke. When I turned towards him, I could not but observe an expression of brutal, impotent rage on his features. The girl on the left—the tall one, who more particularly attracted my attention—was regarding me with no less curiosity than I had bestowed upon her. Meeting my glance, her white teeth gleamed for an instant, and she carelessly allowed the umbrella she held to touch the king's head. Instantly he turned, and with a furious exclamation struck her with a wand he carried. The girl staggered back, but instantly recovered herself; and I then saw that the blow had inflicted a wound upon her forehead, from which the blood flowed. I felt much inclined to knock the brute down, and started forward a pace on the impulse of the moment. But Rambobrande caught my arm, and said, in broken English:

"What for make fight? woman belong to black king. Why white king make trouble?"

Even he, one of the most amiable and intelligent savages I ever met, did not see any thing particularly wrong in the act of striking a defenceless girl—a slave—for so small a fault. However, although I did not think it advisable after the blow had actually been struck to avenge it, both the king and the girl herself read my half start forward and the expression of my face aright.

She shrank a little back so as to be beyond the observation of her master, and, holding the umbrella

over his head with one hand, placed the other on her heart, and made a slight bow. I saw her lips move, and guessed she was expressing her gratitude in the only way in which she could. Suddenly Mocumbra Bogo turned sharply round. I think he must have noticed my gaze fixed on his slave, and guessed that she was signalling to me. It was very incautious on my part, and when I noticed the fiendish expression which came over his face, and the girl's look of intense terror on being detected, I could not but think that she would suffer for my carelessness and her own gratitude. However, nothing more passed on that occasion. But there was an angry, furtive look about the eye of the savage king, a quick glance over his shoulder ever and anon, which sufficiently indicated that the incident was not forgotten.

He was the first to speak and open the interview.

"What does the White King want in the territory of Mocumbra Bogo? and why does he refuse the tribute, and seek to kill and destroy his warriors?" Rambobranda translated this to me, and I replied through the same medium.

"Amarantha, the White King, will pass where he likes without paying tribute. He is strong; his warriors have great and mysterious fetiches, and cannot be defeated. His weapons are as terrible and destructive as the thunderbolt and lightning. But the White Spirit is merciful, and will pass on without molesting the city or country of Mocumbra Bogo, or slaying his warriors, if he is not provoked. But should he or his people attack or in any way molest Amarantha, he will destroy the city, lay waste the country, and kill or make slaves of all his people." When this was translated to the chief, he gave vent to a few guttural exclamations, and was then for some time profoundly silent.

When he spoke it was in a loud voice, and with a sort of chant. The words, which I did not understand, were instantly taken up by all his people who

heard them ; warriors, Amazons, slaves, all screaming the refrain at the top of their voices.

“Let Amarantha and his warriors depart in peace—Mocumbra Bogo’s warriors are his slaves. He shall be provided with all he wants—rice, flesh, and fish for his army; and trusty hunters shall guide him on his way.”

It was the first sentence of this reply which his people chanted, and I gathered from Rambobrandta that it was a formula always used when peace was made between two nations. But my black friend told me quietly that he distrusted the liberal promises of the other ; and when, after a few more words, my late enemy proposed to give a great dance and banquet to myself and all my army, I felt half inclined to decline ; but on second thoughts I decided I would accept, take him at his word, and use unscrupulously any thing I might require. But I was determined to guard against treachery, and therefore arranged that less than half my force should enter the city, the rest to remain in their entrenchment under the command of my second chief, Ramjamroc.

The audience was now broken up. I noticed that Mocumbra Bogo was highly elated—his eyes gleamed either with joy or some other feeling, and a smile, or rather grin, which might have meant any thing, broke out on his ugly face. He appointed one of his chiefs to execute any orders I might give, and it was arranged the great feast should take place on the following day at noon. The chief, who was deputed to take my orders, led us to a large building right opposite the king’s, and only inferior to his in size. This was to be my abode so long as I remained in the city, and my people were to have all the huts on either side, from which the owners were at once and rudely expelled. This all seemed fair and straightforward enough, but nevertheless I was not without misgivings of some intended treachery.

I at once set about making arrangements which I

thought would render abortive any attempt of the kind. I planted two cannon in front of the large hut appropriated to me, in such a position as to command the whole length of the broad street which led to the breach in the mud wall where we had entered. I could then sweep it with grapeshot if necessary, and prevent our retreat being cut off, supposing there should be another fight. I also erected a rough barricade, and placed a strong guard. Even then I was not satisfied. I thought of the camp outside the town, where were all my stores, ammunition, and the fleet of canoes. The forest and bush came close to this on the other side, and I could not help thinking there was danger of a sudden attack during my absence. This might be most disastrous, and the question was how to guard against it. I bethought me of a plan by which, even if by treachery and surprise my intrenched camp should be taken, I could yet bring disaster on the enemy. I determined to move a part of the fleet and two cannon to the other side of the river; also about sixty men, and the greater part of the ammunition and valuables. This I resolved to effect secretly in the night. My force would then be divided into three parts. One portion would be in the city, under my command; the other in the intrenched camp, under Rambobrandá; while the third would be across the river, in charge of Ramjamroc. For my division, headed by myself, I had no fear; nor could Ramjamroc be assaulted on the other side of the river, even if he did not succeed in moving about thirty canoes over without being observed. The only portion for which I feared was that in the camp—as an enemy could approach unseen quite close, concealed by the forest and brushwood.

So soon as I had planted my guards and cannon, and seen the rough barricade I have spoken of thrown up, I prepared to start for the camp, and instruct Ramjamroc to move over with thirty canoes and some sixty men shortly after dusk, and before the moon rose. I took Ramoon with me, each carrying a double-

barrelled rifle. I had no fear; for the whole street was covered by the cannon, and I had beside planted a body of men at the end—on the breach. No one attempted to molest me; but as I walked across the large open square, I saw a corner of the matting of the king's house raised, and though he, doubtless, thought he peeped out too cautiously for me to observe him, my eyesight was too acute. "That black scoundrel has got some scheme in his head," I said to myself; "if he attempts any treachery, I will read him a lesson he is not likely soon to forget!"

I was right in my surmise, as the sequel showed, but had no idea of the nature of the plot he was maturing.

About half-way between the mud wall and the camp, I met Ramjamroc, who was coming to me with a dozen men. He reported that some of my men, who went into the forest for firewood, had seen people moving about—a great number of them, who scattered and disappeared before them.

This was alarming news. Probably the whole forest teemed with the black king's men. Messengers had very likely been despatched to all the adjoining country, and each hour swelled the force around my little camp.

I noticed before I left the town that all, or nearly all, the fighting men and Amazons had disappeared; most likely a rendezvous had been appointed in the woods, and, for aught I knew, an overwhelming army was being assembled to attack my camp, stores, and canoes, and capture them by a sudden rush. This caused me to hasten my projected movement; so I ordered Ramjamroc to cross over to the other side, with thirty canoes, one hundred and fifty men, and all the cannon, and such arms and muskets as were not required by the garrison. He was very intelligent, and at once comprehended my plans, and promised to move over quietly directly it was dark, and keep a bright look-out for signals from me. I arranged a

simple code by which we could communicate. A rocket, from either camp or town, should be a signal of attack; and he would then move out near to the river, and fire into the town and such bodies of the enemy as he could discover by the moonlight.

I pointed out to him a creek or inlet on the other side, something resembling that where I had moored my fleet and pitched the camp. Great trees, with wide-spreading branches, grew close to the river bank, and under their gloomy shade double the number of canoes might be moored unseen. Having clearly explained every thing to my lieutenant, I hastened back to the town; for, to tell the truth, I did not like being away, as the news he brought me made me almost sure that some treachery was intended.

When I got back to the town, and approached the great square, I noticed a crowd in the centre thereof, and next there fell on my ears piercing shrieks, as of a woman in agony or terror. I ran forward quickly, and a sight met my eyes which made my blood boil. The unfortunate umbrella-bearer—the girl who had before aroused her tyrant's anger—was bound to a post, her hands being tied together above her head. She was entirely naked, and some dozen savages were, under the direction of the cruel wretch Mocumbra Bogo, firing little arrows, about two inches long, into her body. The pain was, of course, incessant and agonising, as her shrieks proclaimed.

I started forward, broke through the ring, and knocked down one great savage, who had just shot one of the darts into her shoulder, and was laughing at the yell of pain the poor girl uttered.

"Release the girl!" I shouted angrily. "I will shoot the first man who touches her!"

Almost simultaneously, the king cried out in a loud voice. I could not understand the words, but scarcely were they uttered than a tall black fellow, hideously tattooed and scarred all over, advanced, and, with a great club, aimed a furious blow at the wretched

prisoner. I tried to intercept him, but, as he was nearer than me, only succeeded in spoiling his aim, so that the girl did not receive the full force of the blow, which fell partly on the post to which she was fastened, and partly on her shoulder.

The brute was about to repeat the blow, when, without a moment's hesitation, I raised my double-barrelled rifle, and fired. I had no time for a good aim, so the ball, instead of passing through head or body, as I intended, struck him on the right arm. With a howl of pain, he dropped his club, and, dashing through the ring of spectators, was making off down the broad street. I, however, was furious at the cold-blooded nature of his attempt, and cared little whether he acted by order of his master or not. Quick as lightning, my rifle was again at my shoulder. I took good aim this time, and, just as he was about sixty yards off, fired. The bullet hit him full between the shoulders, passing right through his body. He fell, and lay writhing in the agonies of death.

A great shout went up to the sky. There was a sound of discordant instruments; and, above all, rose the voice of the king, giving some orders, as I supposed, for my destruction. But I knew that my followers were close at hand, and, in turn, shouted myself:

“Amarantha! Amarantha!”

Rambobranda and all my people in the town had heard the disturbance, and the two shots; and soon I was conscious that they were rushing to my rescue, led by my brave chief officer, Rambobranda. I snatched Ramoon's rifle from his hand, throwing my own down, and pointed it full at the king, who was seated about twelve paces distant. His life was in my hands, and, having just witnessed the fate of his executioner at six times the distance, he knew it as well as myself. I saw the savage monarch turn a sort of blue colour with fear. At the same moment Rambobranda and a dozen of my best men burst through the crowd, and ranged

themselves by my side. They were all armed with muskets and cutlasses; so we could have made a very pretty fight of it, especially as still more effectual assistance was coming every moment.

"Rambobranda, tell that black thief to call off his men—order them to throw down their arms, or in ten seconds he dies!"

I kept the savage chief well covered while Rambobranda was delivering the message, and, had he but attempted to escape, or repeated his orders for his people to attack me, I should have sent a brace of bullets through his body.

My commands were obeyed. He spoke a few words in a muttered tone, and the crowd fell back.

"That won't do!" I cried, seeing they did not disarm; "tell them to throw down their arms, or the king is a dead man. If he moves, I will shoot him!"

Rambobranda conveyed this to my now thoroughly cowed foe; and a few moments afterwards I had the pleasure of seeing all arms—spears, swords, and clubs—thrown on the ground. My victory was complete!

When all had retired, I instructed Rambobranda to parley with him. He did so; and I gathered from the surly answers which my lieutenant translated to me, that the girl was sentenced to death for theft; and, acknowledging himself vanquished for the time, he thought it hard he could not punish his own slave for such a crime.

I pretended to be satisfied, but made him promise that the girl should be pardoned. Then, with a very bad grace, he ordered her to be released. The instant this was done, the poor girl, who was not seriously injured, thanks to my prompt interference, snatched up her scanty clothing, which lay close by, and ran off down the street with the agility and fleetness of an antelope.

Then there ensued more "palaver;" and the result was, the matter was patched up, and a nominal peace again reigned between us.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE FESTIVAL—TREACHERY—THE SLAVE-GIRL SAVES ME
—THE ATTACK—THE REFULSE—THE DOOMED CITY

THIS chapter, reader, is to me a painful one. To tell the truth, I cannot look back with pleasure on the events it chronicles. I hate the memory of the savage, cowardly, treacherous tyrant, who so nearly compassed my utter destruction; and cannot hold myself quite blameless for the bloodshed and rapine which ensued.

The banquet was arranged for the following day, and our dangerous host wished it to take place in and around his own house: I and my chiefs to share the glories of his savage palace with him, and all my people in the open space without. But through Rambobranda I at once put a veto on this, and informed his sable majesty that, as he was a stranger to me, and had proved himself unfriendly, I declined to trust him; and should take every precaution for my safety. So I arranged that the affair should take place within and outside the hut allotted to me. Looking down the broad street, I could see through the breach in the mud wall (which I had refused to allow to be repaired) my own camp, and, by means of a code of signals,—red, white, and blue flags,—could communicate with Rambobranda, who was in charge there. Also I arranged to have a strong guard over my artillery, which should be ready for instant service; posted sentinels in convenient places; and altogether took such precautions as I thought would baffle any attempt at treachery.

Strange that I should have utterly overlooked the real source of danger—should never have had a suspicion of the black king's intentions!

He yielded to my wishes, and every thing was ordered exactly as I directed. Shortly after noon on the day in question a messenger arrived, panting and out of breath, to say that the king was coming. This

was an invariable piece of etiquette, I learned, and though the distance across the square could not have been more than a hundred and fifty yards, the envoy had to make a circuit around the town, so as to arrive in a state of perspiration and exhaustion, befitting the importance of the occasion, and the grandeur of his master.

Then there followed a hideous jangling of discordant music, and I saw his majesty approaching at the head of a procession of chiefs, warriors, and slaves. I advanced to receive him, not subserviently, but as a great king should one of lesser consequence—court-cously, condescendingly. I had discernment to see that my black friend was deeply incensed at my behaviour, and even his own warriors looked on him, I thought, contemptuously.

Well, the banquet in question commenced, and proceeded satisfactorily enough for some time. Sturdy slaves brought over from the cooking-place of the king's house large vessels full of all sorts of savage messes—few of which I could fancy. The big calabashes were set in the middle of the circle formed by my men and the king's warriors. Then female slaves handed round dishes composed of the half of cocoa-nut shells of each hash. I declined several, not being able to tell of what meat they were composed, but at last accepted a half-shell full of what one of my chiefs told me was the flesh of antelopes, stewed with rice and wild herbs. I was hungry, and the dish savoury enough; so, by the aid of a pocket-knife and a cocoa-nut spoon, I made a very good meal.

The same female slaves next handed round small gourds filled with some African drink made of the juice which runs from certain trees, as I was informed, for I took care to ask of the chief who sat at my right hand what was the nature of every thing offered.

Now, I myself have always been in the habit of drinking water with my meals—so I declined to drink is beverage, and asked for the former. The king pressed

me, and, in the fashion of his people, offered to pledge me. This, my mentor on the right told me, was done by placing the cup containing the drink on the top of the head, letting it rest there for a moment or two, and then swallowing it at a draught. I declined this for the present, and informed the king that I would just finish my meal, and till then drink water. When this was conveyed to him, he bowed, placed his own calabash down, and seemed content to wait. But not so with my people. They drank freely of the liquor, which, whatever it was, they seemed to enjoy greatly. I did not fancy any of the other messes and stews, so when I had finished the antelope stews I declined any thing else. Then Mocumbra Bogo again challenged me to drink with him after the manner of the country.

I, utterly unsuspecting, accepted, and first tasting the liquor, which I did not find unpleasant, I followed his example, placed it on the top of my head, and then drank it off.

I noticed that a singular expression came over his ugly features, that he grinned a triumphant smile, and said some words to the chief on his right hand, who also grinned and replied something. I knew by the taste of the drink that there was something spirituous in it, but did not imagine it was strong. My people seemed accustomed to it, and drank it with obvious relish.

Mocumbra Bogo again challenged me, and I again accepted. I had placed the calabash on the top of my head as before, and was about drinking it off, when an unexpected incident occurred. A hand is softly laid on my shoulder, and, turning, I see, to my great astonishment, the slave girl whose life I had saved. The savage king opposite me started to his feet, and shouted some words in a furious tone. At the same moment the girl took the calabash from my hand, and quietly emptied the contents on the ground; then shaking her head gently, she crossed her hands on

her breast, and crouched down behind me. I could not comprehend the meaning of this strange conduct on her part; stupidly blind, I did not even suspect the truth, and she, being unable to speak my language or that of my people, could not explain.

But I could very plainly see by her manner, her look, and the way in which she shrinkingly crouched close to me, that she was imploring my protection. The chief on my right, who, in the absence of Rambobranda, was my interpreter, told me that Mocumbra Bogo demanded his slave to be given up to him. The girl obviously understood this, and clung to me weeping, and, though I could not understand her words, I knew she was entreating me not to give her up.

I need scarcely tell my readers that I had no intention of so doing. I have, I trust, too much chivalry—too much British pluck—ever to refuse my aid to a woman in fear and danger. So I rose, and, in angry words, addressed the savage king. “If you were king of all Africa,” I cried angrily, “instead of chief of a paltry tribe, I would refuse to give that girl up to you. I will protect her with my life; she shall go with me, if she chooses; for I know, you cruel ruffian! you would ruthlessly torture and murder her if I left her here. I will purchase her from you at a fair price, but she shall never be given up to your tender mercy. You have my answer. I care not whether it is peace or war. *Warriors, soldiers, and followers of Amarantha, the White King, to arms!*”

My interpreter translated this to him, and as soon as the speech was understood, all my people started up, seized their arms, and with loud shouts bade defiance to the enemy.

I had well instructed those in charge of the artillery and the sentinels. The former at once turned the guns on our enemies; the latter came in and closed around me, and the signalman at the top of the hut at a sign from me waved the red flags in order to apprise

Rambobranda at the camp that there was danger of a battle. But at the very last moment Mocumbra Bogo, cowardly as he was cruel, gave in. He retired in high dudgeon, and again I was the victor.

So soon as the tumult was a little quelled, the girl rose and looked in my face. Then she commenced crying and wailing, and by signs intimated that she wished me to let some of my people conduct her out of the town. I knew not her object, but when I understood her, I at once gave directions to that effect. I noticed, with some surprise, that no reply came to my signals from the camp. The next thing I observed was a strange vague look in the eyes of all those who had partaken of the liquor.

But even then no suspicion of the truth dawned on my mind. All my people were in high spirits—dancing, singing, and shouting. It just crossed my mind that some of them had been indulging a little too freely in the seductive drink; but that was all. The great square was now left entirely to ourselves: the black king, his warriors, and even the inhabitants, had disappeared. The day was very sultry; the hot sun of Equatorial Africa blazed down upon us, and what with the heat and other things I felt quite drowsy. So, after giving particular orders to the sentinels to keep strict watch and guard, I went into the hut; not with the intention of sleeping, but to escape the intense heat. Presently, however, I found sleep overtaking me, and, seating myself with my back to the rear of the building, I dozed off.

The next thing I remember was some one sprinkling water in my face: lazily opening my eyes, I saw by the evening light—for it was already sunset—the slave-girl holding a dish of water. On the ground beside her was a small calabash, which, so soon as I was awake, she held to my lips. Feeling sure that whatever was her motive it was a kindness, I drank the liquor, which was bitter, and not pleasant. Next I tried to move.

To my horror I found my limbs were numb and useless! They refused obedience to my will. Then the truth slowly dawned upon me—I *had been dosed with some poisonous compound*. The girl knew it, and was endeavouring to save me by administering an antidote. I do not remember clearly what followed—I was so frightened and excited. I remember gradually recovering my strength, partly from her shifting my limbs, and also from the effect of the drink she gave me. *Now* I understood why she wished to be conducted outside the town. It was to seek in the forest for the herbs which would counteract the effects of the narcotic poison I had taken. I remember her leading me, almost blind, and with faltering step, to the front of the hut. For a moment she raised the corner of the matting, and allowed me to look out. I saw all my people—sentinels, chiefs, warriors—lying about utterly insensible. They had all taken the same poison, and in greater quantity. On the other side of the square I could dimly see a great array of men. My treacherous foe was marshalling his forces to seize the sleepers, and also attack the camp. I suffered the girl to do as she liked with me. I felt like one in a dream, and was almost helpless. She hastily removed a slab of wood and a piece of bark from the back of the hut, and we both crawled through the opening. In a short time I found myself by the bank of the river. She pointed to a small canoe, and motioned me to enter, and make my escape from this accursed place. The cool evening air seemed to revive me, and as my limbs recovered strength my reason returned, and I remembered the canoes and men I had sent to the other bank of the river.

Happy thought!

Could I reach them, all might yet be well. I motioned to the girl to enter the canoe, and pointed to the opposite bank. She seemed scarcely to understand me, but obeyed without question.

She took the paddle, and the light boat rapidly

shot across the river. I bathed my face and head, and felt myself rapidly recovering from the sleepy, trance-like state in which I had just lain. It was with a shout of joy and exultation that I leaped on shore close to where my canoes and my men, commanded by Ram-jamroc, were. They were all awake, and the chief himself came to meet me. In a few words I explained what had occurred; and the order was passed round to quickly arm and man the canoes. It was now dark. I held a brief consultation with my lieutenant, partly in his language, partly in English. We decided to run quietly across to the camp, and see how affairs were there.

Arrived, I found my worst fears confirmed. Abundance of the fatal and insidious drink had been sent from the town; and every soul—even including Rambo-branda in command—was in a deep stupor. While some dragged the cannon on shore, and prepared to resist an attack, others threw water over, and endeavoured to arouse, the sleepers. After a time, we got the greater portion of them to their senses; and in an hour or so had reason to hope they would be sufficiently recovered to be of use.

Suddenly there flamed up a myriad of torches in the forest, at the rear; and I saw a whole horde of savages advancing to what they considered a bloodless victory. They had already reconnoitred, and, finding all quiet, concluded that the garrison slept a drugged sleep, and that there was no fear of resistance.

But they were woefully deceived. I caused all the cannon to be dragged round to the side threatened, and, when the mob was within thirty or forty yards, opened fire. The boom of the cannon was succeeded by shouts and yells of deep awe; then by the cries and screams of the wounded.

While some reloaded the guns, the rest of Ram-jamroc's party kept up a fierce musketry fire; and terrible havoc was made in the crowded ranks of the too-incautious enemy.

A few more rounds sent them shrieking away in a panic ; and soon we saw them debouch from the wood, and run across the open ground towards the town.

But morn now streamed out, and lit up the open space.

The cannons were light, and easily moved ; and ere the flying mob had reached the beach, at least a third of their number were left dead, dying, or wounded on the ground.

Those who had been drugged now began to revive. The thunder of the cannonade, the shouts and yells, aroused them ; and soon we were able to organise a force of two hundred men for an advance.

I was mad with rage ; and, anxious for the safety of our men in the town, led my men on at once, leaving Ramjamroe to bring on the field-pieces.

We crossed the open space at a run, and with wild yells charged over the breach into the town.

The king's army seemed utterly panic-stricken by the unexpected resistance, and offered scarcely any opposition, but broke and fled down the broad street the moment we got to the breach. My men behaved splendidly. They kept well together, loaded and fired rapidly as they advanced ; and I am sure their yells were loud and terrible enough to frighten any enemy.

Arrived in the great square, at the end of the broad street, we found a confused mob of at least two thousand, huddled together like sheep, in terror of my compact band of some two hundred—only ten to one !

Then there commenced a terrible scene of carnage. There was no controlling them when once their blood was up. They loaded and fired their muskets till their ammunition was all gone. Then they resorted to spears and arrows ; and, finally, rushed on pell-mell, and despatched the survivors with cutlasses and dirks.

There was no attempt at resistance. The enemy seemed utterly wild and terrified.

When the mob in the square had been slaughtered to a man, my soldiers threw off all order.

The town was fired ; and all that night such a scene of pillage, blood, and rapine went on as I never wish to see again.

The sun rose on a heap of ruins and corpses. All those of the inhabitants who had not succeeded in escaping at once were put to the sword ; and not a single hut was left standing.

The king—the treacherous tyrant!—Mocumbra Bogo was found dead, under a heap of others, outside his own house. I had no pity for him ; but regretted the slaughter of women, old men, and children, which, however, I was quite powerless to prevent. In the morning, after taking every thing away I thought might be of service, I returned to our camp. There I found some fifty or sixty, who, having drunk more of the drugged liquors, were still insensible. Of these, about twenty died ; and I suppose we lost ten or a dozen in the attack on the town.

The slave-girl, on my return to the camp, fell at my feet, and, clasping my knees, commenced crying and wailing. I judged that she was imploring me to take her with me.

I need scarcely say, that after her noble conduct, to which we owed our escape from utter destruction, I consented ; and from that time Taranta Medona, for such I learned was her name, accompanied me on my travels.

I managed to save some prisoners—mostly slaves—from slaughter ; and, pitying their homeless, destitute condition, placed them under Ramjamroc, and took them with me.

That afternoon we proceeded up the river, leaving behind us the still smoking ruins of the town, which, through the treachery of the king and chiefs, had suffered so terrible a fate.

CHAPTER XL.

HUNTING ADVENTURES—THE SLAVE-GIRL'S GRATITUDE.

I BROUGHT away from the city I had destroyed about a dozen dogs. They were a sort of cross between the jackal and the wild dog: long-legged, swift, and not bad to look at; but, as I afterwards discovered, dreadful curs. I had an idea that they would be serviceable to me in my hunting excursions, in tracking game, and otherwise. In this I was much disappointed. I found them of very little service. They would attract my attention to game by barking, but would not hunt or track by smell.

For a week after having the scene of the events related in the last chapters, nothing worthy of note occurred. I had suffered some little loss in men, arms, and ammunition, but the former loss was counterbalanced by the accession of the slaves whom I liberated, and who voluntarily joined my army. We had progressed about forty miles up the river when a singular event occurred.

Ramoon had often boasted to me of his supernatural power over the brute creation. He told me that in his own country he had been a "snake-charmer," and that he did not fear the most venomous of these reptiles. Also, that he understood the language of birds and monkeys, and other small animals, and could tame the latter so that they would follow him about.

Now, I knew Ramoon of old, and had heard so many of his tremendous lies that I disbelieved and laughed at all this boasting; but one day I received practical proof that there was, at least, some truth in it. Ramoon for several days had been in the habit, in the afternoon, when we camped, of strolling off into the forest alone, taking with him only bow and arrows, a long spear, a club, some cord, and other things. I wondered what was his object in these solitary excursions, but said nothing. One night, as I was sitting

close to the camp-fire, near the bank of the river, and in sight of the canoes. I saw Ramoon approaching, dragging with him, by a piece of rope fastened round the neck, a monkey. The animal seemed very much frightened, and jabbered and capered about in a most comical manner. I could not help laughing.

"What are you going to do with that little brute, Ramoon?" I said;—"kill him and eat him for supper?"

"No kill he—wait bit—you see. Now he jump about, plenty frightened. Ramoon talk to him—by—he quite good—like dog."

I was curious to see how Ramoon would proceed to tame the monkey; but nothing would induce him to explain to me, or allow me to witness, the process.

To my great surprise, in the morning, just as I was going on board the canoe, Ramoon approached, leading the monkey still by a string. The animal, however, seemed to have got wonderfully tame during the night; and, what most surprised me, evidently listened to some jangling words Ramoon addressed to it.

"He more good now—to-morrow he quite good—run 'bout like dog."

His words really came true. The ugly little wretch came capering down behind him like a dog on the next morning, and, as Ramoon ate his breakfast, perched itself a few paces off, and watched for an occasional morsel exactly as did the dogs.

We were now approaching the tract of country which the natives told us swarmed with wild beasts of every description. During the last week we had progressed up the river between a great belt of forest on either side, peopled only by birds, monkeys, and other small animals; but after we had left the city somewhat more than a hundred miles behind, the character of the country changed. There were tracts of what would be called savannah or prairie in America; and these places were frequented by elephants, lions, caméléopards, hyenas, jackals, rhinoceroses, and many other great beasts.

Every day I was in the habit of taking a couple of guns, the dogs, and Ramoon with me, and striking across the forest in search of game, making a wide circle, and reaching the river again eight or ten miles higher up. I was careful not to go too far from the bank, lest I should be lost, and fail to regain the canoes and the main body.

I forgot to state that there was another who always accompanied, or rather followed, me.

This was Taranta Medona, the slave girl whom I had saved from the fury of the savage tyrant, and who in return had done me already such good service. She would keep uniformly about forty or fifty yards from me, and her great delight was to carry some spears, ammunition, and a spare gun, in addition to the one I had myself and the two Ramoon took. This untutored savage had a kind and grateful heart, as the reader already knows. She had conceived a strong affection for me; and when I lay down to sleep, she would watch by me, chanting a love song, not without melody.

I wished her to clothe herself more in the European fashion; but she, child of the forest, saw no shame in the costume of her country—a simple talpa, or shirt of woven stuff, about her middle; and though she, to please me, put on the calico shirt I gave her, she soon threw it on one side, and next day appeared in the same scant costume as when I had first seen her. This girl was a puzzle to me. She was comely, almost beautiful, with small hands and feet, straight hair, and not a trace of the negro in her features. What could she be? To what nation or tribe could she possibly belong?

She spoke a strange language, which neither Rambobrandta nor any one else among my people could understand. He told me that all he could gather from her was, that she had been taken prisoner after a great battle, when quite a child; that the tribe brought her across country a long

way, and sold her. She pointed to the east, and gave me to understand by signs that her country lay in that direction, a very long way off. So I resolved to teach her the English language, in order that I might satisfy my curiosity. She proved an apt and willing scholar. She could soon answer and ask questions; knew the meaning of the words "gun," "shot," "powder," the names of the wild animals, articles of food and clothing, and every thing which came under her immediate observation. I grew very fond of the girl, and as I sat listening to her soft musical voice, compared her in her savage beauty not unfavourably with some of my own countrywomen. To her my will was law—my lightest wish an absolute command. A word or gesture was sufficient. Had I so commanded her, I am sure she would have swum the river, though it were teeming with alligators. In her eyes I was her absolute lord and master; she, my most faithful and loving slave.

I will not longer dwell on her beauty, her gentleness, and her devotion, but rather go on to relate two hunting adventures, in one of which she greatly distinguished herself.

One sultry afternoon I was walking slowly along the river-bank, keeping in view of the fleet, when some of my hunters, whom I had despatched on an excursion in search of large game, came running up and told me they had discovered the fresh steps of an elephant. As I was extremely desirous of encountering one of those animals, I set out, attended by Clack, the monkey, who was become my chief companion, being equally attached and more sagacious than my dogs.

I found evident marks of elephants having been there. I followed their track till it began to be dusk, and I found myself entangled in a deep and dark thicket. I was about to return, when my ape pointed out to me a curious little bird, called a *touraco*, which is very rare and not easily taken, as it generally perches upon the upper branches of the tallest trees.

This one was hopping about from branch to branch, and led me farther into the thicket, every moment expecting that it would stand still. Tired with the chase, I fired at a venture, and had the pleasure to see it drop. My dog immediately darted forward, but shrank back from the bush in a fright, whining and creeping towards me in great agitation. Clack partook in the fright, and, darting from me, sought shelter in a tree, where he sat shaking his head and chattering.

Not being able to account for all this commotion at the death of a little bird, I advanced to the bush; and I then saw two large flaming eyes fixed upon me, and distinguished the form of a prodigious panther. His neck was stretched out, his teeth were displayed in frightful array as he grinned, muttering in horrid tones my destruction.

I already thought myself devoured, but my dogs, which were close at my heels, saved my life by distracting his attention; for while they kept at a respectful distance on each side of him, he hesitated which to make choice of.

Fortunately I had my double-barrelled fowling-piece—one barrel loaded with large shot, in expectation of finding an elephant; the other with the small shot I had first discharged at the *touraco*. I immediately levelled my piece, and lodged a brace of bullets in his chest. The monster seemed scarcely sensible of the blow, and, at one bound clearing the bush, scarcely gave me time to jump aside behind the trunk of the large tree where Clack sat trembling with fear.

Ramoon was close behind me when I fired, armed with a long spear and musket. The panther, in missing me, ran himself upon the spear, or Ramoon must have been seized between his paws; the spear snapped with the shock, and he felt himself staggered. But whilst the dogs teased the ferocious beast behind, Ramoon, with a quickness almost inconceivable, had levelled his musket and fired, hitting him upon one leg, which seemed to lower his courage.

He paused for a few moments, shaking the woods with his howling. He was about to make a second spring, when, being now ready with my gun, I stepped from behind the tree, firing one barrel after the other. As the balls lodged in his body, he gave a most tremendous groan, and, leaping perpendicularly at least six feet from the ground, came down with a frightful shock upon his back, evidently in the agonies of death. Then, lashing the ground with his tail, tearing and scattering the dirt with his long claws, in the convulsions of destruction, he presented to me a sight at once terrible and strange.

He seemed to have lost his senses, for he made no attempt to revenge himself, venting all his rage and strength upon the ground. There was no knowing what might be the termination of this scene if we suffered him to come to, and so, having both loaded again, our second discharge stretched him lifeless. It was by this time quite dark; we were benighted in an untrod forest, and knew not a step of the way back. The fright we had suffered was not lessened by these circumstances, and we had to fear that the animal we had just killed was not without a companion, who might revenge his friend when we least expected.

The thought of remaining where we were for the night presented the most gloomy images; but there appeared no other resource. Ramoon proposed that we should take a lodging beside Clack in the branches; when this cunning and cowardly companion made up for his timidity by a new instance of superior sagacity.

He no sooner saw the panther actually dead than he left his retreat, and took his station on the back of one of my dogs, who had shrunk away with as much fear as himself, and seemed not a little pleased at feeling himself once more under the care of his master. Thus mounted, he began to advance.

This little circumstance determined us. We had had so many instances of the dependence to be placed

upon his sagacity, that we followed him with confidence, though great caution, through the trackless forest.

On this occasion I had been careless enough to start on the excursion without my pocket compass, but resolved that never again would I be so foolish. Fortunately we succeeded in striking the river in less than half an hour, and arrived in camp safely about two hours before midnight. I at once despatched a party to skin and cut up the panther, as they could easily follow our track and return.

Now for the other adventure.

I have already said that as we proceeded up the river large game became more abundant.

We had not yet seen any elephants, though my hunters brought frequent reports of having discovered their tracks.

But buffaloes and antelopes were in tolerable plenty, as well as hippopotami and alligators in the river; but hitherto we had seen nothing of the great beasts of the forest—lions, rhinoceroses, or elephants. Meanwhile small game was killed in large quantities; and the flesh being cut into strips and dried, our stock of meat, instead of decreasing, grew larger. This was matter of great congratulation to me. I had some six hundred mouths to feed, and, like a careful general, did not neglect the commissariat department; and resolved to lay in, if possible, a stock sufficient to last my whole army for a couple of years, even though I delayed our journey by spending days and weeks in hunting expeditions.

I recall those times with great pleasure. Often and often since, when in desperate straits, or suffering from hardships and the constant fear of death, I have looked back with delight on these excursions in what I may safely call the "happy hunting-grounds."

Not that the sport was free from danger. Even when chasing the timid antelope or almost helpless giraffe, a hunter is incessantly in danger of being at-

tacked by a lion, by chance disturbed ; or he may be tossed by the wild buffalo, trampled to death by the huge elephant, or vainly fly in terror before the fierce charge of the untamable rhinoceros. All these dangers he is constantly liable to ; and when they do arise, his life depends on a prompt, quick, and steady aim.

If the eye quails or the hand trembles, the penalty most frequently is death.

Unless there is shelter close at hand, it is a forlorn hope, indeed, to hope to escape by running from the charge of wild buffalo, elephant, or rhinoceros. The two latter are, perhaps, more terrible than the buffalo, though larger in bulk ; for if they are eluded once, twice, or three times, they do not give up the chase ; but again and again stopping themselves, when they have overshot the mark, they will turn and rush madly at the object of their enmity.

It requires a brave heart, a cool head, and a steady hand ; but undoubtedly the best way to act is to stand your ground, wait till the beast's head is within ten paces, then fire only once (if you have a double-barrelled piece), and immediately, without waiting to see the result, spring on one side.

If you miss with your first barrel, and still retain your nerve, you have a chance with your second.

The heavier the ball, the shorter the gun, and the larger the charge of powder, the better the chance.

If I were compelled to be placed in an arena, as were the gladiators of old, with a rhinoceros, and might choose my weapon, I should have little fear of the result. I would have a short, heavy gun, carrying an iron bullet, or, better still, a plug, weighing about half a pound. At ten paces I could make almost certain of hitting the animal's head, and the shock from so heavy a projectile would certainly stun the biggest rhinoceros that ever was the terror of African forests.

I had long had a desire to hunt and kill the lordly lion—the king of the forest ; and when, therefore, one night, as I lay under a canvas tent, a big fire blazing

in front, I heard the terrible roar of this beast, I was—in place of being alarmed—delighted. I can conceive circumstances under which the lion's roar might strike terror to the heart, especially when it is quickly taken up by others, and joined in chorus by the jackal's dismal howl. My people were all in considerable terror of the king of beasts; for in the part whence they came, lions are rarely, if ever, seen; but, nevertheless, I resolved that at the first break of day I would start on a lion-hunting expedition.

I could tell by the roars—taken up by others immediately after one commenced, till the whole air reverberated with the terrible sound—that there were at least five of them prowling about.

I slept little through the night—kept awake not so much by the howlings of the wild beasts as by excitement and anticipation of the morrow's sport.

Two hours after daybreak my hunting party was in readiness to start. I had selected forty of my best hunters, who, strange to say, preferred their spears to muskets. Rambobranda explained to me the reason of this. In case of being charged by the lion, four or five of them standing together could present a *chevaux-de-frise* of spear-points; and, though the shock might hurl them all to the ground, it was probable the beast would impale himself. The ground was moist, so we had no difficulty in following the *spoor* of the lions.

After walking about three miles, we emerged from the forest into an open plain, covered with long grass up to our middles. It was nervous work, wading this; for we knew not every moment that a lion might not be in our path; and at every rustle or noise I started, and, finger on trigger, prepared to do battle.

I, Rambobranda, and Ramjamroc walked first—abreast of each other. Ramoon followed, with the monkey Clack capering and chattering around him; while the rear was brought up by my forty hunters, who marched in a compact body.

I myself had made this arrangement. Marching

first, as being the post of danger and honour, and best befitting us, the leaders; I caused the others to keep close together, in case of a rush by the aroused beasts.

We walked through the long grass for more than a mile without seeing any trace of the lions; and I began to fear we had lost them altogether.

But presently Ramjamroc gave vent to a sudden cry, and pointed to an eminence about half a mile distant. Looking that way, I discovered a dark object slowly moving up the slope. When it reached the top, it turned broadside towards us, and I saw a lion in relief against the sky, with huge head and mane.

The animal seemed to be sniffing the air, as though scenting us.

While I was gazing, a rushing sound in the grass behind and on the left hand drew my attention. This was followed by loud shouts and yells, and a general scattering among my hunters in the rear. Almost instantly afterwards there was a rush, a snarling growl, and a tawny object came bounding in front of me. I instantly knew that it was a lioness. She stopped for a moment, looked around, then, with another great leap, was gone! I could watch her track by the waving of the grass, and occasionally see her, as she dashed ahead towards the hill. I was so taken by surprise, and she darted away so rapidly, that I had no opportunity for a shot. It appeared that, as my men were marching along, she suddenly arose from among the tall grass; and, after running a few paces, during which some spears were thrown without effect, bounded away.

The panic into which my hunters were thrown should have convinced me that I could not place much dependence on them. Nevertheless, I was determined to carry out the adventure. I knew there were two lions at least—a lion and lioness—on the hillock, which was comparatively bare of grass; and boldly advanced to the attack. When I arrived at the foot, I halted, and arranged my men in a circle, so as entirely to sur-

round it. But they would not thus form themselves about half-way up, as I wished, nor could I prevail on them to stand in any other way than two together. This, of course, made a wide circle with many gaps in it, and was little better than useless.

However, I hoped that I might get close, and have a good shot with my big double-barrel, not doubting that, under these circumstances, I should kill my first lion.

So, having made the best arrangements I possibly could, I marched boldly up the hill. At the shoulder of the mound I halted, and cast about me as to the best way of making the advance. At this place the little hill was not above two hundred yards in circumference, and quite bare of trees or shrubs. On the top there were some bushes scattered here and there, and among these I suspected the lions were. Above all things, I was desirous they should not escape without, at least, my having a shot; so I suggested that instead of going up all together in a body—in which case the lions, if so disposed, might walk down the other side—we should place ourselves at intervals of fifty yards each, so as to be certain of seeing our enemy. Ramjamroc and Rambobranda, to their honour be it said, did not share in the timidity of the others. I believe firmly that constant intercourse with a white man (for they were always by my side) had, in a measure, imbued them with the spirit of adventure and daring for which our countrymen are renowned. I had certainly noticed a great change in them—Rambobranda especially, whose only fear seemed to be lest he should not sufficiently distinguish himself.

So when I made the suggestion, they at once accepted it, and each of them hurried away to place himself at the appointed side of the hillock; I and Ramoon taking that on which we then were.

Having given them time to post themselves on the other side, I made a signal to Ramoon, and commenced slowly to ascend.

I carried a double-barrelled rifle, and a single-bar-

rel slung across my back; Ramoon had also a double-barrelled rifle, as well as my savage warrior chief.

I must own that I felt rather nervous as I made my way up. The top of the mound, crowned with bushes, was only some sixty or seventy yards from me. I felt almost certain that, somewhere among the dozen or two patches of brushwood, the great beasts were.

All was silent, and I could feel my heart go thump, thump against my ribs. I do not believe it was fear; but the deathly silence, and the knowledge that at a few paces distant there lurked the great beasts who could perhaps see us, though we could not see them, might well make the boldest feel a little nervous.

Step by step I advanced, looking round occasionally to see whether Ramoon on my right, and Ramjamroc on my left, kept pace with me. A shout from the other side of the hill apprised me that the lion had been sighted by my friends, and I quickened my pace and advanced up the hill at a run. Almost immediately I heard two reports, and knew that Rambo-branda had fired. Ramjamroc and I arrived at the top simultaneously, and were just in time to see three lions bounding down the hill. We had only time to raise our pieces and fire, when they disappeared in the long grass. I could see the heads of the circle of sentries I had posted, and hoped the lions would be stopped by them and driven back, so that we might get a fair shot.

But my hopes were doomed to disappointment. A sudden commotion and bobbing up and down of the heads, accompanied by loud cries, warned me that the beasts had been seen by my hunters. A few seconds more, and I saw all three bound high above the grass and disappear; again to spring up and vanish. A few such leaps put many yards between them and my people; and knowing that, for the time, my prey had escaped, I, with a sigh, prepared to descend again. Turning round I saw, to my surprise, standing close behind me, the slave girl, Taranta Medona.

"You here, Taranta!" I said, in astonishment.

She now spoke English pretty fluently; and, in addressing me, seldom or never used her own dialect.

"Taranta has followed my lord, lest the 'bounding beast of the forest' should seize him, and his slave not be there to offer her life for his, to let the lion feed on her body, and allow my lord to go free."

"This is very foolish of you, Taranta!" I said, rather angrily. "I do not choose to be followed by a woman when I hunt: go back at once!"

She looked very much grieved and crestfallen at my words and obvious displeasure.

"Must Taranta return alone?" she said. "May she not follow humbly in the footsteps of the White King?"

"No; go back at once! I do not want you."

She bowed meekly, and, without another word, turned and was leaving me, when I bethought me it would be cruel to compel her to return alone. She might lose herself, or be attacked by the lions; so I called her back: "Taranta!"

At the sound of my voice she bounded to me like a fawn, and stood awaiting my commands.

"You may return with me; walk a little behind, so that you may not be in the way."

She fell on her knees, and, in token of gratitude, kissed my hand. I thought no more of it at the time, but afterwards had good cause to thank my stars for her presence.

From the summit of the hill on which we stood I could command a view of the dark, slowly flowing river, the encampment on the bank, and fleet of canoes moored beside it. Accurately taking the bearings with my pocket-compass, I started, intending to return straight as the crow flies. I had no longer any thought of the lions. Doubtless they had escaped, and were now far away: so, consoling myself by saying, "Better luck next time," I slowly descended, and made my way through the long grass.

My friends, the two chiefs, knew their road, and walked on quickly; while my hunters, doubtless thinking it dinner-time, started off at a run, and I found myself pursuing my way with only Ramoon and the slave-girl following me. Presently we arrived at a large open glade, where there was little or no grass. Near the centre of this was a clump of bushes; and, as I reached them, I sat down in the shade to remove a small sharp stone which was hurting my foot.

Taranta and Ramoon walked on. I rose to my feet after a few moments, picked up my gun, and was about moving on, when suddenly a loud roar shook the air, and, with slow, majestic step, an enormous lion stalked forth, and stood face to face with me.

His eyes gleamed fiercely, and the roar was followed by a low, snarling growl, equally as terrible.

He was not more than five paces from me. Flight was impossible: I raised my rifle; but before I had put it to my shoulder, with another terrible roar the beast sprang upon me, seized me by the shoulder, and, shaking me as a dog would a rat, hurled me to the ground, and then, with one paw upon me, stood growling and snarling fiercely.

I was not stunned—not even frightened. It was a very curious feeling which possessed me. I turned my head a little, and looked up in the monster's face. I could also see Ramoon run back and fire both barrels of his rifle, but without effect; for, not taking the slightest notice of him, the lion again seized me, and commenced dragging me towards the bush from which he had emerged, doubtless with the intention of eating me at his leisure.

Just before this I saw Ramoon again loading his rifle.

"Too late—too late!" I said to myself. "My faithful friend, I thank you; but your aid cannot now avail me."

Ramoon, I knew, was very inexperienced and clumsy in loading firearms, and generally did this for him

myself. I felt neither fear nor pain; indeed, the sensation, strange to say, was rather a pleasurable one. I can only compare it to the feeling—as described to me—of a person under the influence of chloroform, who *sees* the operator while carving away at his flesh, smiling all the while, with no pain or sensation whatever.

I am inclined to believe that this numbness of sensation—this deadening of the nerves to pain—occurs to all animals when seized by the carnivora. If this be so, it is a wise and merciful dispensation of Providence thus to rob death of its agony and terror.

I know not how long the time was—it seemed to me to be hours—as the lion slowly dragged me towards the bush. Really, however, it could not have been more than a second or two.

A wild, shrill cry fell on my ear, again and again repeated, and, turning my eyes listlessly in that direction, I saw Taranta Medona running full tilt at the lion with levelled spear. Her hair was dishevelled, and flying loosely in the wind; her eyes gleamed brightly; and, as she travelled over the ground, I could almost fancy it was the goddess Diana rushing to my rescue.

Another wild cry—she is upon the lion! The brute drops me, and, with one angry snarl, turns upon his assailant. Indeed, at that moment I felt no fear whatever for myself—only for her.

In her furious charge she had struck the lion full in the flank, just behind the rib, and with such force, that the sharp weapon went right through his body. It was a most fortunate thrust; indeed, had the spear struck him any where else, though it might have wounded, it certainly could not have killed him outright, or indeed have seriously disabled him. The savage beast turned, and, for a moment, I feared he would spring upon her; but feeling the pain, he bit savagely at the spear, which was still sticking in his side. Ramoon had now again loaded both barrels of

his rifle, and advancing bravely close to the lion, which was roaring, gnashing, and endeavouring to tear forth the spear which he had seized in his teeth, my faithful follower fired, and the bullet striking the beast behind the shoulder, he fell over dead.

So soon as this fact was evident, Taranta Medona rushed up to me, and, falling on her knees by my side, weeping and wailing bitterly the while, commenced to examine my wounds. Tearing open my leather shirt, she could see the wounds that the lion's fangs had made in my shoulder. One tooth had gone through the shoulder, the other through the fleshy part of the arm, and all the parts around were bruised and inflamed by that terrible grip. Blood was flowing freely; and the first object being to stop this, Taranta ran off to seek for leaves and herbs. I had before had occasion to feel grateful for her skill and knowledge of the medicinal properties of certain plants, and now she succeeded in saving me from bleeding to death.

I recovered slowly from the effects of the shock, pain, and loss of blood; and when it was evident I was coming round, Ramoon started off for assistance, leaving me in the care of Taranta Medona—the dead body of the lion lying a few paces off.

My head lay in her lap, whilst she constantly applied leaves, moistened from a calabash of water, to my wounded shoulder, sometimes sprinkling my face, and all the while murmuring a low, sweet song.

As I looked up, and saw her soft, melting eyes beaming fondly, pityingly on mine, I thought it was not Taranta Medona—the slave-girl—but an angel or good fairy in mortal shape.

Presently some of my people, headed by Rambo-branda, returned, and I was carried to camp on a litter made of boughs.

Taranta Medona ran by my side, constantly sprinkling my face with water, keeping off the flies, and moistening my parched lips.

Ah, my sweet African beauty, though I live for

centuries, and thousands of the most beautiful damsels of all lands pass before me, never can they efface you from my memory, nor tear your lovely image from its casket in my heart!

Wild, untutored child of nature, you thought not, recked not, of aught but your love for me. I had saved you from your brutal tyrant: henceforth I was your master, your lord, your second self, your very life.

Never was mortal worshiped with deeper devotion than was I by this beautiful savage. I feel certain that, had I ordered her to kill herself, she would have instantly done it. All through the fever which supervened on my wound she nursed and attended me. For days and nights she took no sleep; and at last, when the fever left me, and I slept, she would only repose at my feet.

So soon as I recovered from this illness, I gave orders for the camp to be struck, every thing put on board the canoes, and, under the direction of Rambo-branda, we again made a move up the river. This lion adventure, besides seriously injuring my arm, caused a delay of a fortnight, during which my people roamed about at pleasure, and, regardless of all discipline, did as they liked—eating and drinking, but not adding any thing to our stock.

We made but slow progress, as the river ran much more rapidly, and was swollen, through up-country rains. A large awning of silk had been erected over the stern of my canoe; and beneath this I lay, on the skin of my dead enemy the lion, listening to the plaintive melody which Taranta Medona, ever by my side, warbled, and, as I recovered strength, laying fresh plans and building more castles in the air.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE SAMOONA.

So soon as I had recovered my strength, I at once set to work. I found that my army had suffered terribly in discipline—like all inferior races who have been accustomed to act under the orders of Europeans: once remove the master mind, and it is astonishing how soon they lapse back into barbarism and their old habits. I found that my *prestige* had suffered greatly by reason of the lion having wounded *me*, whom they supposed to be invulnerable. I foresaw that I should have some trouble in removing this bad impression, and then it must be a work of time.

Meanwhile, I determined to lay in a very large stock of meat, and then proceed on my expedition, and prosecute it to the end without again delaying on the road.

Having resolved on a grand hunt—a sort of carnival of slaughter—I determined to put it in practice before we left the open country, as in the dense and thorny forests farther on the plan I meditated would be impracticable.

I had heard much from Rambobranda of a mode of hunting by means of an enormous trap, called in some parts of Africa a *hopo*, but in my people's dialect *samoona*.

The *samoona* is simply a huge pit, and the animals are driven into it by means of a fence gradually widening out therefrom. Now, I had an idea of improving, or rather doing this on a larger scale, so as to get as much game in one day as we could cut up, dry, and pack in a fortnight. I calculated that, if my plan succeeded, we could provide enough for two years for all my army. This may seem an exaggeration, but when I go on and describe how I set about it, I think my readers will acknowledge it was the very biggest hunt ever attempted.

We were now in the very centre of a tract of land teeming with animal life. A broad belt of long jungle-grass and brushwood ran along each river-bank, gently undulating, and slowly sloping upwards towards the grand old forest, which, at about eight miles' distance, loomed black and frowning.

Water was every where abundant, and vegetation luxurious—even rank; so that those animals who live by vegetables, having abundance, increased rapidly, and the beasts of prey—the carnivora—also increased in proportion. How long this had been going on I cannot say, but on one day I am certain I saw, from the top of a high tree near the river-bank, such countless herds of deer, antelopes, hartbeests, gnus, zebras, giraffes, buffaloes, elephants, and other animals, as never had been seen by mortal eye before. The Indian warrior's dream of the "happy hunting-grounds" was here realised in sober fact.

I commenced making my arrangements for the grand hunt as follows:

I caused to be dug, near the river-bank, a huge pit, sixty yards long, forty yards broad, and ten yards deep. This occupied a week, two hundred and fifty men constantly working at it. From the edge of this I commenced building a double fence of newly hewn posts and rails, which were interwoven with branches, so as to form a thick fence, through which even a small animal could not pass. This fence, for the first hundred yards, widened out slowly, and formed a triangular lane. As it receded from the pit it widened out; it was, in fact, of the shape of the letter **V**, and the farther it receded, the wider became the opening.

My intention was to prolong it on each side for at least eight miles; indeed, to the edge of the forest, when there would be an interval of not less than five miles between the two.

Reader, you can scarcely fail to divine my plan!

I will proceed to tell you how I carried it out, and with what result.

More than a fortnight was occupied in the task of constructing the double line of converging fence. While this work was in progress, though we saw plenty of game, I strictly prohibited any being killed, reserving to myself the right of occasionally knocking over any bird of rare species or beautiful plumage. This was a very pleasant time. At early morning, attended only by Ramoon and my faithful girl Taranta Medona, I would sally forth over the plain towards the forest, and see how my workmen progressed with the lines of fence, to form my gigantic trap. I did not venture near the desert, for that part I knew was inhabited by the larger game—rhinoceroses, buffaloes, giraffes, and lions. These latter, and the hyenas and jackals, came down into the open country every night on their marauding expeditions after the poor little antelopes and smaller animals, by which the whole belt of country along the river was thickly populated.

I saw various descriptions of small deer, hartbeests, elands, and monkeys, but disturbed them as little as possible, not wishing to frighten them away and spoil the grand battue I had in prospect. With this object I laid aside my gun as much as possible, and grew proficient with Taranta Medona's bow and arrows, with the aid of which not a day passed but I killed something.

Great was her delight on these occasions, and she was never tired of singing a sort of song of triumph over my achievements to Ramoon, Rambobrand, and such of my chiefs as, after the toils of the day, sat with me round the watch-fire.

Those were glorious days. The weather was beautiful; and as I had in a measure become inured to the sultry sun of Central Africa, I did not suffer from the heat. By day wandering about over the plain, luxuriant with tall grass, and shrubs and flowers of strange and gorgeous nature, with Taranta Medona and faithful Ramoon, attended by his monkey, as my only companions, collecting specimens of rare plants, birds, and insects, at times resting by the side of the many little

creeks leading up from the sluggish old river, quaffing *topee* (a particularly delightful drink made for me by the slave-girl, and a calabash of which she always carried for my use), and listening to the low murmuring of Taranta's voice, till the heat of the day should have passed. At night sitting round the camp-fire, with some half-dozen of my principal officers, discussing the proposed doings of the morrow; Rambobranda, Ramjamroc, and myself could mutually understand each other's language, and so could converse freely. Sometimes I would listen to their wild legends of the powers and glory of their ancestors—the races of giants they overthrew—their past success in every thing they undertook—and a thousand other anecdotes and extravagances which, though I forget them now, amused me greatly at the time. Occasionally I would relate to them the wonders of my own country: talk to them of steam-engines, machinery, monster cannons, and all the appliances of civilisation. My adventures, too, "Up in the Air and Down in the Sea" were food for incessant wonder and amusement. Then, as the evening stole on, Taranta Medona would throw over me the skin of my dead enemy the lion, and herself crouching at my feet, would murmur a soft, plaintive lullaby, till sleep closed my eyes, and I was in the land of dreams.

Ever in the morning, when I awoke, I would see the gentle girl kneeling by my side, with a small calabash of hot coffee, prepared by her own hands, awaiting my acceptance. Then a plunge in the water of the lukewarm river (care having been taken first to scare alligators away by beating all around with poles); then to breakfast, of rice, cake, and boiled antelope, or fish, or whatever else was convenient; and then, having drawn up my working parties, and despatched them to work at the fence under their respective leaders, I would myself shoulder my rifle, and, with the slave girl bounding and dancing around me like a playful fawn, would start out for a day's sport.

At last the double fence, eight miles long, and with

a distance between its extreme ends of about five, was completed. Having inspected and approved of it, I put my scheme in operation.

I selected four hundred men, and armed them with muskets and spears. These I resolved to take with me on my great hunting excursion, leaving the remainder under the command of Rambobranda, to take care of the camp and fleet of canoes. Between the river and the pit which I had caused to be dug, I built a pile of dry wood, and covered this with about ten times the quantity of green branches and grass. My object was not fire, but a great column of smoke, and I knew this was the best way to attain it. I gave instructions to Rambobranda to fire this about an hour before sundown, and to keep it fed with green wood. Then, each man providing himself with every thing requisite for camping out in the forest, I formed them into two columns, and marched off. The distance to the edge of the forest was about eight miles, and we arrived there two hours before sundown, as I had halted during the heat of the day. We had, on our march, seen several herds of giraffes, hundreds of deer, many buffaloes, but, hitherto, no elephants or rhinoceroses. These, with the great carnivora—the lions, panthers, and hyenas—kept during the day in the gloomy shade of the forest. Our path was now beset with danger, for at any moment a troop of elephants might charge down upon us, or a fierce rhinoceros rush into our dense ranks.

However, danger or no danger, I ordered an advance into the forest, and keeping a careful look out right, left, and ahead, we marched on.

I halted half an hour before sundown, and gave my parting instructions to Ramjamroe and the other chief who accompanied me.

Ramjamroe was to march to the left with two hundred men, and at every thirty or forty yards, or thereabouts, he was to station a man, who, having had his instructions, was to light a fire and camp out. When Ramjamroc should have thus stationed all his

men, he would have traversed and posted sentinels in sight of each other along a line of several miles.

The other chief doing the same to the right, there would be an uninterrupted chain of men eight miles long. Each man would light a fire, and wait for the signal to advance, in the way I had described.

I myself camped in the centre, with only Ramoon, four hunters, and Taranta Medona.

Having built a big fire, Ramoon and the girl set about preparing supper. Scarcely had the shades of night closed in, when I had practical experience that this part was inhabited by a class of animals totally different from those on the plains by the river-bank.

First in the howling concert with which we were regaled came the dismal whine of the jackal and wild dog. Then followed the discordant ha! ha! ha! of the laughing hyena, accompanied by a prodigious bellowing by I know not what animal.

We were just seated round the fire, and had commenced supper, when a thundering roar awoke the echoes of the forest. This was succeeded by others, chorused by the howling and screaming of jackals and hyenas, and many other sounds I had never heard before.

But above all rang out the loud, deep-toned roar of the lions. It was very curious, the way in which this serenade was managed; and one would almost have thought it a prearranged thing among the wild beasts. At one moment there would be little noise, beyond a low whining by the jackals; then there would peal forth a low, deep roar from a lion, gradually swelling in loudness. This would be taken up by another and another, till it resulted in one grand crash of roaring, which actually made the air shake, and pained the ears. This horrible uproar would gradually subside, again to commence, and so on through the night.

Of course, under such circumstances, sleep was out of the question. It was impossible not to feel some alarm at the terrible din, though I had reason to sup-

pose that our fires would prove sufficient protection against attack by the wild beasts.

The girl Taranta was quite overcome by terror, and crouched close to me, trembling violently when the roaring was at its height. However, by degrees we got used to it; though, I must confess, I did not feel at all comfortable when, at times, a loud crashing and crackling was heard among the brushwood, and a pair of gleaming eyes would be discerned flashing on us.

Shortly after midnight, the girl, quite tired out, fell asleep; and, gently wrapping her up in the lion-skin, I rose, and, taking my gun, ventured a little way among the trees.

The roaring had ceased; so I concluded that the lions had taken their departure, and, therefore, thought a little voyage of discovery would not be amiss. The fact is, I was weary of sitting so long by the fire without the possibility of sleep. I walked on, carefully peering before me, and halting to listen every now and again. No sound fell on my ears, save the howls of jackals, and occasionally a crashing amongst the bushes some distance off; so, gathering courage by impunity, I walked boldly on.

After having gone I should say more than a quarter of a mile, I turned and looked back. The sight was grand and impressive in the extreme.

From the central fire of our camp, I could see on either side the fires of the sentinels, stretching away into the forest till lost in a dim line of light.

Anxious to get a better view, I walked up a mound, or hillock, on the top of which stood a solitary great tree. Placing my back against this, I gazed forth on the scene.

I could see the group around our camp-fire, and several of the sentinels, as they stood by theirs to the right and left; then, looking farther down the long line on either side, the individuality of each was lost, and it seemed as though some magician had marked the land with a streak of fire.

I was looking at and admiring the scene, when suddenly I heard a loud crash behind the tree against which I stood. I started; and, taking a step to the left, looked to see what it was.

I found myself standing face to face with a huge bull elephant!

He looked at me for a moment with his savage little eyes; then, uplifting his trunk, uttered a hoarse bellow, and charged on me. It was no time for hesitation. I fired one barrel of my rifle, and bounded down the hillock.

I heard his ponderous tread behind me; and, as I knew that an elephant, clumsy though he be, can outstrip a man when infuriated, I sought shelter behind a tree.

The great brute came against it full butt; and I really thought he had uprooted it, so terrible was the concussion.

It staggered him for a moment, and gave me time to run behind another tree, about fifty yards farther on. I had only a few moments for reflection, when again I saw his huge bulk charging down on me.

I knew not what to do. This game could not last. I knew the sagacity of these brutes, and felt certain that he would not long continue butting his head against big trees; and as soon as I saw him coming,—and knew by his roars that he was aware where I had dashed myself,—I started off full speed for the camp-fire, shouting loudly all the while.

I don't know why I thus acted. I believe it was because I was utterly at a loss what to do to save myself. The hill was rather steep just here, and it retarded the elephant's progress, so that I was close to camp when I again heard him thundering over the ground and bellowing behind me.

Taranta Medona ran to meet me, and with the utmost bravery confronted the great brute, as he rushed down on us. She motioned me to run, herself standing firm and erect.

Brave girl! She was willing to sacrifice her life to save mine. I should have been base indeed had I allowed her to do so.

Catching her arm, I drew her with me, and ran towards the fire. I had a hope that the great beast would not face this, and thus we might escape.

We were only a few yards in front of the elephant when we arrived panting in camp. I saw the blacks and Ramoon scramble up a tree, using their toes as hands, and get out of reach. I had big boots on; and, besides, there was no time.

A sudden thought—a happy inspiration—flashed across my mind.

I knew that elephants hold tigers in the utmost dread and aversion, and can with difficulty be made to approach the carcass, or even the skin of one.

Might it not be the same with regard to lions?

Quick as thought, I threw myself down with Taranta Medona, and drew the lion-skin completely over us. The next few moments were pregnant with awful suspense and dread. We could hear the brute approach in a heavy, sauntering trot, bellowing all the while.

The next instant there was a grand crash of calabashes and cooking utensils; then a crackling and crashing, followed by a scream of rage and pain from the elephant. I knew by the tremendous concussion that he had fallen; but almost instantly he struggled to his feet, and, with tremendous roars, rushed off.

Then I cautiously peeped out, and saw to my great joy that the coast was clear.

Rising, I found the fire scattered in all direction; and, by the imprint of the beast's feet, knew that he had, in his blind rage, crashed right through it, and, in so doing, fallen.

Whether this was caused by the skin, which he might have taken for a veritable lion, I cannot say; but must content myself with chronicling this among my many marvellous escapes.

I could not help embracing Taranta for her bravery and reckless devotion to me ; and then resolved that, after this second proof of her love and gratitude, she and I should never part.

We collected the scattered embers, remade the fire ; and, I need scarcely say, I did not venture on another excursion into the forest that night.

And now the time was come for putting my grand hunting project into execution. Consulting my compass, I ascertained exactly the direction in which lay the camp by the river. Then I told one of my men to mount a tree, and watch carefully for the blaze of the fire which Rambobranda was to kindle about an hour before daylight.

So soon as this was reported to me, I passed the word down the line, to right and left, to be in readiness. Then, having packed up our camp equipage, and loaded all the guns, I waited patiently for daylight.

Just as the dawn broke in the east, a lurid flare in the sky, in the direction of the camp, informed me that the beacon-fire was lighted. This was quickly followed by a dense column of black smoke.

All was in readiness ; so I gave the appointed signal, which was a discharge in line of all the firearms.

CHAPTER XLII.

HOW MY SCHEME SUCCEEDED.

THEN there arose on the night air a tremendous din. Shouts and yells all along the line, fading away into the distance, accompanied by the constant and successive reports of muskets, as each sentinel fired according to orders, made such an uproar as had never before been heard in that primeval forest.

The jackal ceased his dismal howling, and listened ; the lion arose sullenly from his lair, and gazed

around to see what all the row was about; the stately elephant and mad rhinoceros put their huge bodies in motion, not knowing whether to fly or attack the unseen enemy who thus dared disturb them in their forest home; the fleet zebra and the clumsy giraffe galloped wildly over the plain at the sounds; droves of deer darted hither and thither in confusion, and the timid antelope, startled from repose, bounded swiftly away from the direction of the noise; the birds and monkeys screamed and chattered in the tree-tops; and herds of wild buffaloes careered bellowing over the plain; the hyena's bark-laughing cry is hushed, and the cowardly, treacherous brute slinks to cover and hides his ugly body in terror; the wild pigs roam the plains in mad fear; while such of the panthers and climbing animals as are in the forest take to the trees in alarm. Never was there such uproar and confusion among the brute population of those savage wilds.

And now our line—not of battle, but of the chase—advances. Imagine a line of shouting, yelling, half-excitement-mad blacks running forward, leaping in the air, firing off their pieces, and altogether making the air hideous with their noise,—imagine, I say, this line, eight miles long, advancing through a forest on to prairie ground, both forest and field thickly populated; and then, reader, picture to yourself the panic and astonishment among the brute creation.

As we emerged from the gloom of the woods into the open ground, the sun rose in golden splendour, and shone bright over the landscape. Wishing to obtain a good view, I halted, gave my rifle to the girl, and ascended a big tree standing on high ground. When I had obtained a favourable position, I looked forth.

Never shall I forget the scene: it was the **most** splendid and exciting I had ever beheld. From where I stood, between a forked branch, I could command an uninterrupted view, right, left, and ahead. The

grass round the edge of the forest was not so tall and rank as nearer the river, so I could the better discern objects. There was a belt of about a mile and a half of this comparatively sparsely vegetated land. This was absolutely teeming with animal life. I could see the dark line of my men as they emerged from the forest, and marked with triumphant satisfaction the success of my scheme so far.

Herds of buffaloes and single ones galloped about madly; giraffes and deer of all descriptions fled in dense masses before the advancing line. I could see, too, single animals—some crouching and crawling along, others dashing ahead by long bounds, and all hurrying towards my converging rails. I noticed, too, multitudes of small objects running along, like countless black specks on the panorama spread before me. These I judged to be wild hogs, jackals, and such like. I noticed, too, a number of long-legged birds, running with great speed before my hunting army. These I knew to be ostriches.

Presently my eye fell on a great black patch moving somewhat more leisurely, and I at once recognised a drove of elephants. I counted thirty-seven in this one herd, but there must have been many more. I noticed, too, that there were a great number of zebras, who galloped wildly to the right and left, then back, till they faced my hunters, when again they would turn and join the fleeing herd.

The scene was so enchanting, that for some time I could not tear myself away. It was not till the lines, driving the animals before them, were full a quarter of a mile ahead, that I bethought me of the necessity of descending and joining in the sport. This I quickly did.

"Come, Taranta," I said to the faithful girl, "let us haste and join the chase. It is glorious—splendid!"

I was wild with excitement, and started off at a run, and, for a moment or so, outstripped the young lady. But she, fleet of foot as the wild antelope,

caught me up, and with a gay laugh passed me and darted ahead.

We soon came up with the line, and then, after taking breath, I resolved to go on ahead, and have some sport on my own account, ere the grand catastrophe I counted on should occur. Taranta ran by my side, carrying a spare rifle, while Ramoon followed with another.

The girl enjoyed this fun immensely. She laughed aloud, and her clear, musical voice rang out in joyous shouts as we pursued our prey. Disdaining the small fry—the wild dogs, wild pigs, and monkeys which crossed us every few yards—we passed on, I running at my utmost speed; while Taranta, without the least apparent effort, kept by my side, and, when the fancy took her, shot past me. Going straight ahead as we did, we soon got in amongst the rearmost of the fleeing animals.

I do not think it was with any definite object that I thus ran on, but a sort of nervous excitement possessed me. The bellowings of the buffaloes and elephants, and other big brutes—the bleating of the elands, gazelles, and antelopes—the chattering of the monkeys and the discordant squealing of the wild pigs, mingled with many other sounds—had a marvellous effect upon my temperament, and I longed to be in the thick of the fun. No thought of danger deterred me, or even crossed my mind. Forgotten were the herds of buffaloes, elephants, and the savage rhinoceroses, the lions, panthers, and foul hyenas; I only thought at that moment of the fun of the thing.

“Hoo! hoo!—*Kaberdar!*”

It was the voice of Ramoon, which warned me of danger; and halting suddenly, I saw, as I faced about, a big bull buffalo charging down upon me. Taranta was some twenty yards ahead of me; but when I stopped and turned, she was by my side almost instantly.

I repulsed her almost rudely, for I did not choose

that she should again endanger herself for me. She fell back behind me submissively enough when she gathered the purport of the few sharp words I addressed to her.

All this, which takes some time to relate, happened in the space of a very few seconds. The buffalo, after tossing his head once or twice and snorting angrily, lowered his horns and charged full at me. Summoning all my resolution, I manfully stood my ground. I could see his bloodshot, gleaming eyes—hear his loud pantings—but waited, rifle in hand, until he was within six yards of me; then, taking steady aim, I fired, and leaped nimbly on one side.

Not a moment too soon: for the savage brute charged right over the spot where I stood, then fell headlong to the earth. Running up, I found that my bullet had pierced his skull about half-way between the nose and eyes.

Death was, of course, instantaneous; and the bull must have been carried on merely by the impetus of the charge.

This was my first adventure of the kind. I had never before stood and calmly waited for the rush of an infuriated beast. It gave me great satisfaction and confidence in my own nerve and coolness. Taranta was in raptures at this evidence of my prowess.

A few yards farther on, a beautiful little animal of the hare species crossed my path; and as I pursued it with the intention of capturing it alive, a zebra suddenly started up before me. The poor beast was completely knocked up, and had lain down from sheer exhaustion.

Instantly the thought crossed my mind—I would catch the little striped beauty.

I wanted a horse to ride, and this should be my *Bucephalus*. So, calling to Taranta and Ramoon to join me, away I started in pursuit.

Terror lent the animal speed; and though I gained on and came up to it, I was unable to seize it: for on

attempting to do so, my pony (prospective) darted ahead with renewed speed.

This went on, I should think, for half an hour, till at last, when every moment the zebra was becoming more and more exhausted, I made sure of a speedy capture. But again I heard the warning shout of Ramoon.

“Hoo—hoo!”

“What, another buffalo!” I said to myself, grown arrogant with success. “Ah, I’ll soon settle him.”

But quite a different sight met my eyes, and one at which I might well tremble.

In my race after the zebra I had got ahead of vast herds of wild animals—elephants, rhinoceroses, buffaloes, and giraffes, which at that time must have been galloping about another part of the field.

Now I saw, swiftly advancing towards me, a long line of terrified animals of the larger sorts—all mingled together. I cannot pretend to say how many there were in this motley drove, but there certainly must have been eight or ten thousand, so densely were they packed together, and such an expanse of ground did they cover.

Our situation was critical in the extreme. Escape by running was impossible, as the beasts were not more than a hundred and fifty yards from us, while they stretched to the right and left for fully half a mile.

Again my good genius came to my aid, and not a moment too soon. The ground shook with the thundering hoof-falls of the approaching multitude, the air was laden with terrible hootings and bellowings, and in a few seconds we should have been overwhelmed, when, in the happy inspiration of the moment, I fell on my knees, and producing a small matchbox I always carried with me, I struck a light. The undergrowth of grass was dry and withered, and a little flame shot up instantly. Then I commenced tearing up handfuls of the tall grass and heaping it on the flame. Taranta Medona and Ramoon, seeing this, did likewise, and in a very few seconds we had quite a little bonfire.

Behind this, and as close as possible to the flame, we placed ourselves; and the herd, which a few moments since had threatened our destruction, divided to the right and left, in terror at the blaze, and swept by like a whirlwind. The ground actually trembled as they thundered by.

I believe no human being was ever in such a position before. On either side, a dense phalanx of wild animals rushing at headlong speed—roaring, snorting, bellowing, howling, and making altogether a most horrible noise. This went on for about a minute. Then the last had passed by, and we were standing about under the protecting flame and smoke. Emerging from this fiery shelter, I hastened to return and meet my advancing men, who, I judged, must now be near. This proved the fact, and in a few minutes I was again among them, having in less than an hour had some singular adventures, and escaped two great dangers.

But now there arose something quite unexpected, and entirely beyond control. The fire I had lighted to save our lives spread rapidly to the right and left, at the same time marching steadily on.

I did not at first perceive that in the fire we had a new and unexpected ally. But so it was. The flames spread to the fence on either side, and then, urged by a gentle breeze, advanced along the space between the converging rails. The fire did not spread beyond the rails for this reason: in erecting the fence, the grass had been cut down for several yards on either side. Thus it happened that the dense mass of animals were driven forward in the enclosed space by a wall of fire, which continually marched on.

Another hour, and the fire had nearly reached the narrow land. The uproar was now something awful. The howling, roaring, yelling, and screaming of the entrapped wild beasts utterly beggars description. We could not see what was being enacted on the other side by reason of the flame and smoke, but we could

judge of the horrors of the scene by the dreadful noises which proceeded therefrom. We had other evidence of the havoc being wrought beyond the fiery barrier. For now we frequently passed, in the scorched and blackened ground, the half-burned bodies of some of the smaller game, which, in all probability, were thrown down and trampled on in the wild *mêlée*, were unable to rise, and fell a prey to the flames.

It was now about four o'clock in the afternoon, and we were within half a mile of the narrow lane which led right down to the pit. The enclosed space in front of us was now, I felt certain, a dense mass of animal life. The distance between the two rows of posts and rails was here not more than half a mile, and my four hundred hunters, at first scattered over an eight-mile line, had now drawn close together. I ordered one half to go to the left, outside the rails, and be ready to repair any damages which a sudden rush of the heavier animals might cause. I myself, with the other half, made for the right. The howling, roaring, and yelling of the frightened beasts still continued; but suddenly, above all, there fell on my ears a sound which seemed to me like a piercing human shriek.

A woman's shriek!

Then I suddenly bethought me—Where is Taranta Medona? I looked around: she was nowhere to be seen. Then I remembered with shuddering horror that I had neither seen nor heard her since I came out from before the flame, and joined my men. Where could she be? On the other side of the fiery barrier, among the infuriated, terror-stricken horde. Perhaps she was trampled under foot, and that shriek I heard was her death-cry. Terrible thought! I shuddered as I pictured to myself her delicate form crushed and mangled beneath the ponderous hoofs of elephants and rhinoceroses, or perhaps tossed on the horns of the wild buffalo. Bitterly reproaching myself for my thoughtlessness and neglect, I hastened to the fence, clambered

over and ran down the other side, in order to get in advance of the flames and obtain a view. A marvellous sight met my eyes. A dense struggling mass of beasts of all descriptions packed closely together, surging and swaying as the larger animals in the rear, themselves urged on by the advancing flame, pressed them irresistibly forward. Already they were rushing down the narrow lane and into the pit. But this, which, under other circumstances, would have been subject for congratulation, now gave me no pleasure. An all-absorbing grief pressed heavily upon me. Taranta Mcdona, the faithful, devoted Taranta, who had three times saved my life at the risk of her own, was lost. I, thoughtless, selfish, ungrateful, wrappd up in my own pleasure and the excitement of the chase, had forgotten her. It seemed but too probable that she had perished miserably.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE END OF THE GREAT HUNT, AND HOW I DISPOSED OF THE SPOILS OF THE CHASE.

I HAVE but a very vague recollection of what passed after I discovered the absence of the girl. It seems to me more like a dream—a vision—in which I ran about like one distraught, calling aloud for Taranta; but, presently recovering my self-possession, I started a regular search for the lost one. Great was my grief when her apparently lifeless form was brought to me, borne on a rude litter of branches; greater, however, my joy, when I discovered that she was but in a swoon, and, with the exception of a few trifling bruises, uninjured. She herself gave me an account of the imminent peril she had been in, and of her providential escape. It seems that it was as I feared; she had delayed seeking safety with us till too late, and fled terrified before the flame, which spread rapidly right and left. Though she was

enabled to gain on the fire, the herd of animals overtook her very shortly. She happened to be close to the rails at the moment, and was tossed over by a wild buffalo, and thus saved from being trampled to death. It was her scream of terror as she was hurled aloft from the wild bull's horns which had first called my attention to her absence. So soon as I knew that she was in no danger, and had seen her to the shelter of my canoe, I again devoted myself to the great business in hand. Already some scores of animals had been driven into the pit by the natives pressing on behind; and I soon saw that, large as were its dimensions, it could not hold all. All my men were in a furious state of excitement, adding, by their yells and screams, to the horrible din. In the midst of such confusion it was impossible to do any thing, and now an unlooked-for danger presented itself. Suppose the pit should be completely filled up, the beasts would then be able to pass over the bodies of their dead fellows, and rush on our camp and fleet of canoes. It was providential I saw this danger in time and provided against it, or some terrible disaster must have befallen us. Collecting some half-dozen men about me, I got axes, and by signs gave them to understand what I wanted. This was to cut a breach in the fence close to the pit, so as to give egress to the drove ere the pit should be quite full. Already my scheme had succeeded beyond my expectations, and the very abundance of animals I had been so anxious to procure threatened great danger. We had barely time to cut down a few of the rails, when a sudden rush to this part caused us to seek safety in flight; not a moment too soon, for instantly such of the imprisoned beasts as had not already been hurled into the pit surged through the opening, and, half-mad with excitement and sudden liberty, scattered in all directions, and galloped madly over the plain.

Already satisfied with slaughter, and for prudential reasons glad of their escape, we made no attempt to

stop or fire at them, and so soon as the greater part had gone off and left a clearer space within the rails, the remainder were headed back, and made the best of their way in the direction whence they came, on being hit and driven within the double line of rails so fatal to themselves. At least half of the horde were allowed to escape, and now we were enabled to devote our attention to those in the pit. Standing by the brink of this the sight was marvellous and horrible. At the top were some which, not being crushed or seriously injured, struggled desperately to escape; while ever and anon there would arise a leaving and throbbing of the whole mass, as some strong brute, suffocating beneath, would struggle desperately. Once or twice this upheaving convulsion was so violent, that I felt assured it must be caused by the death-throes of an elephant or rhinoceros of the largest size.

And now we proceeded to work: the first thing to be done, if only for the sake of humanity, was to kill those who yet remained alive, and put an end to their struggles or sufferings. A few volleys from our muskets soon accomplished this, and then we commenced to haul up and skin our spoil, preparatory to drying and packing the meat. Night came on, and but half the work of removing all from the confused mass in which they lay in the pit was gone through. Knowing that in that climate dead animals would keep sweet for but a very short time, I kept my men at work till from fatigue they were unable to do more. Accordingly, near morning, I caused all to be covered up with branches and green grass, to keep off the flies and sun, and then gave the word for a few hours' repose.

Thus ended this great hunt, which had proved so marvellously successful, and been varied by several exciting adventures.

CHAPTER XLIV

HAVING PRESERVED THE SKINS AND FLESH OF OUR SPOIL, WE EMBARKED ON BOARD THE CANOES, AND PROCEEDED UP THE RIVER.

It was a labour of several days, cutting up and preserving the immense quantity of animal flesh we had—and then we only took the best and most likely to keep. The fat of the large animals I caused to be melted down, and for want of barrels used such of the skins as were spoiled or disfigured for receptacles.

As trophies of the chase, I had twelve pairs of elephants' tusks; thirty rhinoceros hides; seventy pairs of horns, with hides to match, of wild buffaloes. Of the giraffe, I selected twelve of the best skins, and left the rest, as too much damaged to be worth troubling about; thirty of the beautiful striped skins of the zebra, and also several hundreds of many descriptions of deer, antelopes, hartbeests, and the smaller game. But this by no means represented the extent of our spoil: more than two-thirds of the skins were so torn and stained during the terrific struggle in the pit, and approaches thereto, as to be quite useless. Then there were many beasts whose hides were of no value at all—and others, again, whose flesh was equally useless.

As it was, before the expiration of a week I was obliged to order the removal of the camp a half-mile farther up the river, on account of the stench from the flesh which was rejected, or could not be preserved in time. This, too, was before we had completed the operations of drying and preserving the skins.

Of meat I had 400 bales, dried and packed, at the end of a fortnight. Each bale weighed about 150 pounds; so that I might reckon on having secured a quantity which would suffice my whole army for two years, even though we should find nothing else to subsist on. This, however, was improbable in the

extreme; and I had no doubt that, though I never replenished our stock again, I could victual my people for three years if needful.

When all the bales were packed and tightly bound with thongs of leather, I had them placed upon the canoes—choosing the largest for the heavy freight, while the smaller I loaded with skins, horns, ivory, and other spoils of the chase.

A canoe, which I destined always to follow my own, I fitted up as a sort of museum. Here I had all the choicest of skins, strange insects, butterflies, and botanical specimens. The floor was covered with the rough hides of hyenas and wolves; while those of the panther, zebra, and cameleopard hung all around, diversified by horns, tusks, and stuffed hides, monkeys, and every object which took my fancy and I thought worthy of a place. I had couches all around this museum of mine, which were lined with the softest furs and skins I could select.

At the head of the table I had arranged a seat, the back of which was the stuffed body of a lion, the arms his fore-claws. Seated in this, with the monster's great shaggy head above me, I looked, indeed, every inch a forest king. There was no regular roof to this strange place of mine, only a tarpaulin and canvas, so disposed as to be water-tight. It was, in fact, a sort of floating tent, and being fastened close to the stern of my grand canoe—or war-ship, as I delighted to call her—I could step from one to the other.

I was very fond of sitting here as we proceeded up the river, Taranta reclining lovingly at my feet, and chanting, in a low voice, some native air. The plash of the oars of my men ahead, the rippling of the water, and the various sounds from birds and beasts which occasionally awoke the echoes of the forest, made the situation, to my romantic temperament, most charming.

I believe my late grand hunt had satiated me with the chase—at all events for a while. As I did not now care about seeking wild animals, the only thing which

would tempt me ashore, gun in hand, was the hope of adding some object of interest to my museum.

Thus a month passed on. The weather, though of course hot and sultry in the extreme, was fair. An occasional shower would temper the great heat, and usually a gentle breeze blew favourably to us. During this month we progressed some six hundred miles without passing through the country of any powerful tribes. At least, we saw no indications of villages, or even dwellings, by the river-banks—so that if there were inhabitants about, they must have resided far in the interior. This I could not believe to be the case, because it is an instinct of all nations to take up their abode and build houses on the banks of rivers or the sea-shore.

I am quite at a loss to account for this dearth of human inhabitants in so fertile a region. Perhaps the very fertility and abundance of animal life, which would have been an inducement to Europeans, deterred the half-naked savages of this continent. They dared not contend for mastery with the wild beasts, but resigned to the lions, elephants, rhinoceroses, buffaloes, and other great brutes, the sovereignty of the forests.

At the expiration of a month, however, there came a change over the scene; the country grew flatter, and in place of the vast trees and dense foliage, we saw undulating expanses nearly destitute of vegetation. Presently, on the river-banks, we began to notice numerous clusters of huts; and now, by many indications, I began to fancy that we were approaching some powerful tribe. The river, instead of getting narrower, as is usually the case in ascending a stream, grew wider, and was at this time quite a mile across. Strange to say, as we proceeded, the face of the country began to change, and all sight of human habitations vanished. I regretted now that I had not landed and obtained information as to the people whose villages we had seen. But I delayed doing so, thinking that we should soon arrive at a large town, where there

resided some powerful chief. However, I determined not to turn back, but to keep our own course. The character of the river now changed entirely. It did not run faster, but there was a perceptible undulation, which increased every mile we progressed; in fact, a regular slow swell, like that on a calm sea.

The banks, too, receded wider and wider apart, so that as we kept close to one, we could scarce discern the other at all. True, it was low—and of white sand, with no trees or vegetation whatever; but this did not prevent my people entertaining a sort of vague alarm.

Keeping to the right bank of the stream, on the thirty-fifth day a grand discovery burst upon me. The surface of the water was unusually rough on this evening, so I caused the canoes to be securely moored in a little inlet or bay. This done, I resolved to take advantage of the short remaining daylight to go for a stroll. I did so, gun in hand, followed, as usual, by Ramoon, and accompanied by Taranta Medona. The ground beneath our feet was fine white sand; and, beyond a few herbs, there was no vegetation. Some object or other caused the girl to run forward. I ascended an eminence, which ran like a ridge at a few hundred yards from the shore and parallel to it. A cry of astonishment brought me to her side; and then a sight burst upon my eyes which I little dreamed of. This land, on which we were, was but a jut of land running out into a vast tract of water—a lake!—an inland sea! About two miles ahead I could perceive its termination. The river, then, ran out from this lake. The thought struck me that, on the other shore, a river ran into the lake; in fact, that this latter was a vast reservoir, in which other rivers might empty themselves, and, again, others have their source.

On the right and left I could see the vast mountains, towards which I had always been tending; but in the centre there was a gap—the clear sky and water alone being visible.

My mind was quickly made up : thither would I bend my course, confident that fresh marvels, fresh adventures, and, perhaps, fresh triumphs, awaited me.

In the morning I called together all my people, and arranged them in a circle, while I harangued them. I anticipated that I might have difficulty in inducing them to launch out into the open lake, with no land in view. I was not mistaken in this : but by firmness and my own confidence I overcame their fears ; and, about two hours before noon, we put forth from the shore, and started on our voyage across the mysterious lake.

But this voyage, and what new marvels I saw, and what adventures befell me, I must postpone to another chapter.

CHAPTER XLV.

WE SAIL ACROSS THE GREAT LAKE

THE sky was serene, the water smooth, a light breeze gently rippling the surface of the lake across which we were sailing. Propelled by paddles and sails combined, we made very fair progress ; and by noon the land we had left began to grow dim and indistinct—a faint line on the horizon—while ahead all we could see was the wild waste of water, and in the far, far distance the great mountains, looming through cloud and mist.

Evening closed around us, and urged now by sails only, the fleet moved slowly and majestically across the bosom of the lake. A deep silence reigned, broken only by the rippling of the water, and the gentle sighing of the wind. A feeling of awe and uneasiness seemed to pervade my people. The songs with which they were wont to beguile the early part of the night were not now heard ; and though I knew by the continual restlessness and moving about of those in the boats following that few slept, not a sound awoke the solemn stillness of the night.

My canoe was a swifter sailer than the others, and, lost in lazy reverie, I did not notice that the rest of the fleet were some half-mile behind.

Looking back, a most romantic and singular sight met my eye. There was no moon, but the sky being clear, the stars gave a feeble light, just sufficient to enable me to make out the broad-lying sheet of water, spreading to the horizon as far as the eye could reach. At the bow of each boat, a small fire had been lighted for cooking purposes, and, as the fleet sailed along on our track, it appeared as though a line of fire was pursuing us. A small charcoal fire, over which Taranta had just prepared me a cup of fragrant coffee, was also burning at the head of our canoe. Wishing to allow the others to come up with me, I went forward, and partially lowered the head-sail. Happening to cast my eyes over the bows, I saw, with a start of surprise, that the water was alive with fish, which, attracted by the fire, crowded around our bows, and, fascinated by the glare, swam along with us quite close to the surface. I had several many-pronged harpoons called "grains," and, quickly procuring one of these, I stationed myself at the bows, and at the first throw succeeded in harpooning a fish about seven pounds' weight, and several small ones from four to ten ounces.

The larger fish I found to be a sort of fresh-water cod, while the small ones were the most elegant and beautifully coloured I had ever seen. They were in shape and size not unlike the trout. The backs and sides were divided into longitudinal bars of fine yellow and deep black, the belly was silver, the eyes black and gold, and the fins a glowing, transparent red. On cooking, we found this little fish most delicious eating, which fact having ascertained, I shortened sail, and when the other canoes came up, set them on fishing, by means of spears, all night. A hundred-weight or so of fish to each canoe was the result of this night's work. They proved an agreeable and

refreshing change of diet, and the catching them diverted the minds of my people from the strange, and to them alarming, position in which we found ourselves.

The sun rose in golden glory, and revealed to us that we were sailing on an inland sea with no land in sight. I say, no land; although we could discern at a vast distance ahead the mountain-range across which lay, I believed, a land hitherto undiscovered, and destined to be explored and traversed first of all by myself.

I could not but notice the urgent uneasiness of my people in the anxious glances they cast behind them in the direction of the land they had left. It is, indeed, scarcely to be wondered at that these untutored, semi-barbarous savages should feel some alarm at leaving home, country, and even dry land, behind them, and sailing audaciously away across an unknown fresh-water sea, to where no one could say. However, I endeavoured to occupy their thoughts and cheer their drooping spirits; and so far succeeded, that on the second night the accustomed songs and jingling of discordant instruments might have been heard.

But on the third day, when the sun arose, and still no land was in sight, though we had been sailing along at a good rate, gloomy and dissatisfied looks met me on every side. However, as no open opposition was made, and not one dared even hint his discontent, I kept on, hoping that the next morning would bring land in sight ahead. But in this I was disappointed. Seven suns rose day by day on a trackless expanse of water. We had now left the shore eight days, and, as we sailed at the rate of quite four knots on an average, we had traversed about seven hundred miles of this great and hitherto unknown lake. It was contemplating this fact that led me to a proper conception of the vastness of the mountain-chain ahead, which, though clearer and more distinct, did not seem much closer. Uneasiness now arose

among my people; and on the afternoon of the eighth day a deputation of chiefs waited on me, and desired to know whither I was leading them. Resolved to put a bold face on the matter, I answered all they asked promptly and fully.

"We are going, my friends, to a great country beyond this sea."

"When shall we see this country? Eight suns have risen, and, behold, there is nothing but water!"

"To-morrow's sun will reveal to you the land ahead," I said boldly. "Keep up, good heart. Is not Amarantha great and all-powerful?"

With this they retired, satisfied to all appearance, and we kept on our course.

Anxiously I looked forth at daybreak on the morrow to see if I could discover the land I had so confidently promised should gladden their eyes. I looked in vain! Still the same expanse of water, gently undulated by a swell, and rippled by the light breeze.

After partaking of a breakfast of fish, coffee, and rice-cake, I took my telescope, and carefully scanned the horizon.

A misty, cloud-like line could just be discerned ahead, and gradually the conviction grew upon me that it was the wished-for land. The breeze at this time freshened, and by noon the indistinct outline ahead could be seen distinctly through the glass, like a belt of shadow along the horizon. I felt increasingly confident that it was the long-looked-for land, and with triumphant voice and gesture pointed it out to my followers, whose failing spirits rose at the sight, and whose confidence in their leader was again aroused.

By night we could make out for a certainty that it was indeed land; but darkness closed around us too soon for me to decide as to its nature and distance.

All through the night we sailed on, keeping an anxious look-out. I saw the dark line gain on my sight, and rise gradually above the horizon. At the first dawn of day I was eagerly inspecting the shore

we approached, after our nine days' voyage across the vast, unknown water. It was not till the sun was just peeping above the horizon that I made out in all its grandeur the nature of this land we were approaching.

I suppose, at this time, we were quite eight miles from it, and yet I could discern the individual trees in the great forest, which ran down right to the water's edge. At once I was impressed that these trees were of enormous magnitude—the smallest of them larger than the largest one I had hitherto met with.

There was soon a brisk breeze, and we dashed merrily through the clear, sparkling water towards this our goal.

At about an hour and a half after sunrise I beached my canoe on a beautiful sandy shore, a strip of which, about a hundred yards wide, divided the forest from the water.

Then I leaped ashore, and as each of the canoes ran up one by one on to the soft sand, their occupants followed my example, wiled with joy at once more setting foot on dry land.

For the moment my *prestige* was fully reëstablished, and the old shout rang forth, waking up the forest echoes, "Amarantha, Amarantha! great is Amarantha!"

CHAPTER XLVI.

MY PEOPLE BRING ME WONDERFUL TALES OF HAIRY MEN WITH HORNS—THE VAMPIRE BAT—I COMPLETE MY CARAVAN.

AFTER having safely moored the larger canoes, and caused the small ones to be hauled upon the beach, I gave directions for their unlading, and, having instructed Rambobranda to make a camp, I set off upon a little journey of exploration, attended only by Ramoon and Taranta Medona.

The prospect was of a grand and inspiring nature. Before us was a forest—vast, dense, and sombre—composed of the most gigantic trees possible to conceive;

behind, the great lake, lying calm and serene, scarce disturbed by the now failing breeze; to the right and left, the narrow strip of white sand vanishing in the distance.

It was to the forest I bent my steps. I had not advanced far ere I became aware that it was inhabited by great animals, whose huge footprints attracted my attention.

After a minute examination I distinguished those of the elephant, hippopotamus, and rhinoceros, besides others, which, however, I could not make out, they were so mixed up together. The ground was soft and damp, and the vegetation luxuriant to rankness. At places I could scarce push my way through the clinging vines, the undergrowth, and the thousand plants which every where sprang up. After walking straight ahead for some two hours, I judged it expedient to return, as the forest grew darker and denser the farther we penetrated it, and once or twice I heard a loud, murmuring roar far ahead, which might have been caused by elephants, or perhaps by some unknown beast; but, armed with a light rifle and fowling-piece, and accompanied only by Ramoon and the girl, I did not feel disposed to go farther; so, not without much trouble, we retraced our steps, and arrived at the place where we had landed some two hours after noon.

The encampment was rapidly progressing, and all seemed prospering; but somehow I soon found that a vague feeling of distrust and alarm was prevalent among the blacks. After a little time I found out what it was which caused this terror, and knew not whether to laugh thereat or be serious.

It appears that a party of them had strolled up into the wood, and had suddenly returned pell-mell in the greatest fright. They reported that they had seen a troop of strange monsters—half monkeys, half men—beasts with hairy bodies, horns on their heads, and capable of walking quite erect like men—not like apes, crawling on all-fours, and only occasionally raising

themselves to an erect attitude. These animals, they averred, carried arms, and, when they observed our party, darted off to a little distance, formed themselves in battle array behind some trees standing close together, and with most horrible human howlings and yells commenced pelting them with stones; whereupon my brave warriors took to precipitate flight, and brought the tale to camp.

I affected to treat it lightly, but determined on a fitting opportunity myself to examine the truth of it. Meanwhile I had other things to do. I had fully resolved to enter this dense forest, and, though it should cost me months of trial and hardship, to reach the great chain of mountains. Beyond them, I had a presentiment that a new and wonderful country lay, and it was my fixed design to explore and prove by the test of experience whether my views were correct or not. So I set my men to work felling trees, preparing timber, and making wheels for rough wagons, on which to mount such of the canoes as I might determine to take with me.

Of course building strong wagons for the transport of such a quantity of baggage was a work of time. The worst of it was, that we had no bullocks or beasts of burden, so I was obliged to build the wagons at once light and strong, in order that each might be drawn by about forty men.

However, the work went on tolerably well, and in the course of a week I had one large and four small wagons built and ready for use; on the largest I mounted my war-canoe, and on the others smaller ones. Still these were by no means sufficient. I found that to carry all our luggage, arms, and provisions, we should require at least twenty, large and small. This would be a work of a month, I calculated, and notwithstanding the loss of time, I resolved that it should be done, and, myself superintending the work, gave up all thoughts of exploring expeditions, and kept close at it until nearly finished.

At night I always slept in a hammock suspended between two trees, the strings of which I had anointed with tar, so as to prevent ants and other crawling insects from approaching. With this precaution I thought myself quite safe, and was indeed unmolested for several nights. But one morning something awakened me at about four o'clock, and to my great alarm I found I was weltering in half-coagulated blood, but felt no pain whatever. The solution of this mystery was, that I had been bitten by the *vampire*, a bat of monstrous size, that sucks the blood from men and cattle when they are fast asleep, even sometimes till they die ; and as the manner in which they proceed is truly wonderful I shall endeavour to give a distinct account of it. Knowing by instinct that the person they intend to attack is in a sound slumber, they generally alight near the feet, where, while the creature continues fanning with his enormous wings, which keeps one cool, he bites a piece out of the tip of the great toe, so very small indeed that the head of a pin could scarcely be received into the wound, which is consequently not painful ; yet through this orifice he continues to suck the blood, until he is obliged to disgorge ; he then begins again ; and thus continues sucking and disgorging till he is scarcely able to fly, and the sufferer has often been known to sleep from time into eternity. Cattle they generally bite in the ear, but always in places where the blood flows spontaneously—perhaps in an artery.

Having applied the leaves of a plant as the best remedy, I washed the gore from myself and from my hammock. I observed several small heaps of congealed blood all around the place where I had lain, upon the ground ; upon examining which, I judged that I had lost at least twelve or fourteen ounces during the night. I have since had an opportunity of killing one of these bats, and I cut off his head. Having measured this creature, I found it to be between the tips of the wings thirty-two inches and a half, though some are much larger. The colour was a dark brown, nearly black, but

lighter under the belly. Its aspect was truly hideous altogether, but particularly the head, which had an erect shining membrane above the nose, terminating in a shrivelled point. The ears were long, rounded, and transparent; the cutting teeth were four above and six below. I saw no tail, but a skin, in the middle of which was a tendon. It had four toes on each wing, with sharp nails, divided like the web-foot of a duck; and on the extremity of each pinion, where the toes are joined, a nail or claw to assist it in crawling, like those of its hind-feet, by which it hangs suspended, when asleep, to trees, rocks, or any suitable projection.

When the work in hand had nearly approached completion, and there remained little to do but to pack the stores and ammunition, and load the rude cars, I gave myself a little relaxation, and made excursions into the forest, accompanied sometimes only by Ramoon, at others by a hunting party. There was a singular scarcity of small game near the borders of the forest; nor indeed were the large beasts—elephants and rhinoceroses—often to be met with. We had frequent notice of the proximity of herds of the latter by the noise they made crashing through the undergrowth, and by their spoor; but usually when we got near, the whole herd would rush off with loud trumpeting, which made the forest ring.

Ramoon had often told me, that if he could get near enough he would “talkee” to the elephants, and make them not run away. Although I had previously had an experience of his animal-taming powers in the case of the monkey, I laughed at this as a new piece of extravagance.

One day, however, an opportunity offered for the Cingalese to prove his words. Returning from an expedition which, beyond the shooting of a few birds and monkeys, had been unsuccessful, we heard a most prodigious roaring and bellowing, which Ramoon, after a little time, said was caused by wounded or captured elephants.

On arriving at the spot whence this uproar proceeded, advancing slowly and with caution, we found ourselves on the edge of a natural chasm, about twelve feet deep. On the other side was a young elephant, doing its best to roar ; but the great noise we heard proceeded from the bottom, where were two full-grown elephants unable to extricate themselves. Venturing close to the edge, where a peculiar kind of herbage of which they were fond grew in great abundance, the bank had given way under their enormous weight, and the two great monsters were precipitated into this natural trap.

Ramoon immediately commenced an unintelligible jargon, which he declared the beasts perfectly understood.

I asked him what he was saying.

He replied, that he was telling the elephants he was very sorry to see them in such a plight.

"And what do they say?" I asked.

"Him no say much ; dis elephant say he want me help him out. What say, massa ? we help dese poor little tings out ob de hole ?"

"A likely thing !" I said ; "to be trampled to death under the feet of the 'poor little things' as a reward."

"No," said Ramoon ; "you help him elephant, he very good, he do what you tell him."

The thought struck me suddenly that if there should be any truth in Ramoon's words, the captured monsters might be made very useful. It was evident they could not extricate their unwieldy bodies from the pit into which they had fallen. I had heard much of the sagacity of the elephant ; was it not possible that, if relieved from their present position, they would be grateful, and evince their gratitude by placing themselves at our service ?

In such a case, as beasts of draught, they would be worth many teams of oxen or horses. By their united strength I doubted not they could with ease drag our

whole caravan. The idea grew upon me, and I resolved upon digging out the two elephants. Not knowing how long the unfortunate brutes had been thus imprisoned, I, with Ramoon, collected a great quantity of green young branches, which we threw to them. These they commenced devouring ravenously, thus showing that they must have been in this plight without food for some time. Having done this, I started off back to camp with Ramoon, in order to get tools to dig out the two great monsters.

It was necessarily an affair of time, as I wished to do the work unassisted by, and unknown to, any of my people.

I had a well-founded notion, that if Ramoon's predictions should be true, the appearance of two tame elephants, willing to do my bidding, would yet further impress my subjects with an idea of my grandeur and invincibility. And indeed it was necessary that I should give some proof of ascendancy and power to these impetuous savages, for of late they had become gloomy and morose; and, though nothing was said, I could see that they were dissatisfied with the progress of the expedition. The voyage across the great water had frightened them; and though it is true I had brought them safely to land, yet my present proceedings filled them with alarm. They saw the canoes in which they had come such a vast distance from their own country mounted on wheels, and all my preparations clearly indicated a long journey overland. Now, they had an insuperable antipathy to leave the water; and it seemed to them, that when they should start on a journey through the vast and trackless forest, they would be abandoning all hope of ever returning to their peaceful village-home—now many, many hundred miles away!

All this I noticed, but said nothing. At last, when the arrangements of the caravan were complete, I thought it expedient, even necessary, to explain my views and plans; so I called them together, and harangued them.

I will here mention, for the reader's information, that after several days' rather severe labour, Ramoon and I had succeeded in digging out the elephants.

"Warriors of Amarantha the Invincible, the great White King! hitherto victory has awaited our every step. The savage enemy, the difficulties of travel, even the wild beasts of the forest, all have succumbed to our strength and valour. We are about to march through the great forest, to the lofty mountains in the far distance, beyond which lies a new and wonderful land—a land fertile and teeming with game—a land where each warrior may become a chief, each chief a king. The hour is come; to-morrow we start on the march that shall conduct us to our final triumph."

There was some cheering at the conclusion of this speech; but it was not received with any thing like their old enthusiasm, as when I first burst upon their astonished gaze, a very god dropped from the skies.

A low murmur arose after the applause had subsided. I could see that there was a good deal of talk going on between some of the chiefs.

At last one came up to me, and, as spokesman for the others, asked: "Whither is Amarantha going to lead his people? Have they not travelled far enough from their homes? Have they not killed beasts enough, and got enough spoil and riches? Behold the war-canoes, and the little boats mounted on wheels! Who will drag them? Where are the beasts of burden? Or does the White King look upon his warriors as such?"

Starting to my feet, I faced my assembled army.

"Faint-hearted warriors!" I said; "with the bodies of men, the souls of women, you ask where are the beasts of burden? Lo! I will show you that Amarantha is still all-powerful. Wait and see!"

I took from my girdle a small bugle, or rather horn, on which I blew a blast. Then I fixed my eyes on a clump of thick undergrowth at the skirt of the forest.

Of course, every body's gaze was anxiously bent on

the same spot. A solemn silence prevailed. Hushed was now each murmur, and all that army waited and watched with breathless interest for what was going to happen.

Presently a crackling and crashing of branches was heard. Nearer and nearer it approached—and now could be discerned a heavy, lumbering footfall. In a few seconds more two huge black bodies emerged from the concealing bush, and with stately step advanced right towards where I was.

There was at first some little suspicion and terror, and a partial rush was made to arms, which, however, I stopped. Slowly and solemnly these forest monsters marched up to me, and, when they were within a few paces, I cried in a loud voice .

“Kneel, O elephants, to your master Amarantha, king alike of men and beasts !”

Instantly the great lumbering brutes fell on their knees, and, having previously made up my mind what to do, I leaped on the back of the larger, and commanded him to rise. Then I spoke a few words to the other elephant, which, docile as a well-trained dog, arose, and followed Ramoon to the front of the foremost and largest wagon, for which I had previously prepared a set of strong hide harness.

Assisted by the intelligent and grateful brute, the task of yoking him was an easy one. All the while my subjects looked on in silent awe and admiration.

I next caused Ramoon to fasten four or five other wagons behind the first.

Then, when all was ready, I turned, and, from my position on the elephant's back, addressed the army :

“Warriors of the White King ! you asked, Where are the beasts of burden and draught?—behold them !”

Then I again blew a low note on my bugle, and instantly the elephant in harness put forth his immense strength, and commenced marching towards the forest, dragging after him about six heavily laden wagons. I stopped him after he had gone a few paces.

Then there arose a tremendous shout of enthusiasm. "Great is Amarantha! the wild beasts of the forests are his slaves. Great is Amarantha! We will follow our White Spirit to the end of the world."

Thus I established my *prestige* and authority on a firmer basis than ever.

On the following morning we started on our march through the vast and unknown forest.

As we plunged deeper into the forest, the aspect of things changed, the brushwood became thicker, the ground was diversified by little hills covered with a rank vegetation. Marching slowly on through the vast profound, I soon became conscious of moving objects amongst the trees. Some of my hunters were in the habit of scattering themselves in search of game, and I thought that the figures I observed, and which retreated ever before us, were those of these men. But as we went on, I became aware of strange sounds—an unearthly, guttural, chattering noise, and occasionally in the distance a dull roar, which I could compare to nothing I had ever heard before. The mysterious forms, too, grew more numerous, always flitting about among the trees like troops of ghosts, and never suffering us to approach near enough to discern them clearly. This was very unpleasant; and soon I discovered that my people began to be filled with vague alarm of a superstitious nature.

Towards evening, as the shades of night deepened around, these wandering phantoms of the forest seemed to grow bolder and increase in numbers. I could make out that they wore the human form, and walked—or ran—erect. Many times during the day I ordered a halt, and endeavoured to ascertain the nature and intentions of these mysterious creatures. But I never could succeed; they always vanished on the approach of a party of even three or four only. Nor did shouting elicit any intelligible response; a strange, unearthly noise of gibbering and howling was the only result.

On the fourth day an event happened which decided me that these beings were certainly enemies. On our march one day, towards evening, we came upon two bodies lying prostrate across our path. On examination, I discovered that these were the corpses of two of my hunters who had gone on ahead to explore. They were lacerated in a most horrible manner—disembowelled, and with the skin and flesh hanging in shreds, as though torn by claws or fangs. "Wild beasts!" I at first exclaimed, but had reason to alter my opinion. Wild beasts would have eaten at least a part of the bodies; these were untouched, and had been thus mutilated from pure savageness. So I came to the conclusion that these lurking phantoms were men, and made dispositions accordingly.

I placed in front a body of thirty men—the best shots of all—and ordered them to fire whenever they discerned any of these mysterious beings. Terrible was the din which arose in the gloomy, primeval forest at the first volley of musketry and the result. I judged by a dreadful shrieking and yelling that our bullets had taken effect, and that the cries we heard indicated the rage of the enemy at the result. Still, though we could make out groups of them suddenly cluster round one, and apparently drag him wounded away, it was utterly impossible to get near. They bounded away like veritable phantoms; nor, although I ordered second charges, could our fleetest runners approach the least bit nearer.

Hour by hour, day by day, our enemies seemed to increase in number, as did the howling and yelling, till it seemed at last that we were marching in the centre of a vast army of fiends, who kept around us, before, on each side, and behind—advancing as we advanced, retreating before us, and closing in behind.

Our progress was no longer a triumphal march, but one of continual terror and harassment. My men gave way to frequent panics, and would huddle up together around the caravan, as though expecting to

be attacked. At this time such an event would have been most disastrous, as, like most black races, when once a prey to fear, it was almost impossible to rally them. I myself was by no means free from alarm, and soon came to the conclusion that something must be done. Hitherto, though we had, I felt certain, wounded and killed many of our gnome-like foes, we had never found any dead or alive. Invariably those who were hurt were borne away by the others. I was at a great loss to decide what kind of men these vanishing enemies could be. It was impossible to make out articulate sounds from their infernal yells, which resembled more the howling of wild beasts than human voices.

But a discovery which struck me with horror was suddenly made. I was marching in advance with Rambobranda, Ramoon, and a few of my bravest warriors, when I discovered in the evening gloom—for it was past sundown—a group of these people about three hundred yards distant. Falling on my knee, I took steady aim with my rifle, and directed the others to do so likewise. A rattling volley produced evident effect. I saw three or four of them fall, and as usual a number of others clustered around, and commenced dragging the bodies away. But I was now goaded to desperation, and resolved, if possible, to put an end to this state of affairs; so, with a shout to those with me to follow, I ran on, loading as I went. I halted again at about a hundred and fifty yards, and favoured the group with another volley. This was even more effectual than the first, as I knew by the unearthly yells and the increased confusion. Finally, when, after loading, I made another rush forward at the head of my men, I saw that two bodies were left behind on the ground; while the others with frantic efforts—yelling, screaming, and leaping about—dragged or carried the wounded. They succeeded in gaining the summit of a small eminence, and this done, they were enabled to quicken

their speed, as it was down-hill. But they had been compelled to leave two, on account of the promptness with which I pushed the attack. One of my warriors outstripped me in speed, and reached the two dead bodies, as I supposed they were, before me. The next moment I heard a cry of pain and terror, and saw that one of these beings had sprung on him, and appeared to be savagely biting his thigh. Instantly I levelled my rifle and fired, the bullet passing through the head. Still, to my surprise,—for I knew the bullet had gone home,—the foe clung to my unhappy warrior, whose shrieks were dreadful to hear.

Then I approached close, and saw a sight which made my blood run cold. It was not a man at all—not a human being, but a hideous monster, hairy all over like a bullock, with long claws for fingers ; dreadful long tusks projecting from the upper jaw, like those of a walrus or a huge wild boar. These tusks were at least eight inches in length, and with them the brute had completely transfixed my man. The wretch was dead, but the horrid fangs had gone right through the thigh and had become fixed, from the muscular contractions of the powerful jaw. The face of this beast—horrible to say—was that of a man ; and there were two short curly horns on the crown of the head.

Trembling and sick with terror, I set to work to release the poor fellow whose thigh was transfixed. Not without difficulty I did so, with the assistance of another of my men. Then I discovered that the wounded man was also dead. This surprised me greatly, for though the fangs had gone through the flesh of the thigh the wound was not mortal, neither had much blood been lost ; so I concluded that fright had been the cause of death. From the first I had been aware of a horrible stench, and now that I was quite close it was absolutely overpowering. It made me feel quite sick, and what with that and the horrid appearance of the monsters, both of which were quite

dead, I felt very near fainting. I can only compare the stink to that which might be caused by boiling a thousand skunks and polecats in the contents of a cesspool, and adding thereto some hundredweights of putrid fish.

My hands, from touching the monster, were contaminated, and I hastened down the hill to a stream I saw at the bottom, in order to wash. The man who had assisted me to take off the monster from his victim came with me, and, to my surprise, howled as though in pain all the way. Arrived at the brink, he fell down, endeavoured to reach the water, but failed, and then cried piteously :

“O Amarantha, the wood-devil’s tooth scratched me—my arm swell up—cut it off—cut it off !”

In a few seconds he was delirious, and in less than five minutes *dead* !

Then the truth burst on me: these brutes’ fangs were imbued with a deadly poison, and both my unfortunate men had thus perished. I shuddered as I examined my own flesh, and gave vent to a sigh of relief when I discovered that I was not scratched. Having refreshed myself by bathing, I went back to the top of the hill, where lay the body of my unfortunate man, also those of the two monsters. The former had, in that space of time, swollen fearfully—the result of the poison—and, moreover, had turned to a sickly, greenish hue, most unpleasant to look upon. The stink was so dreadful that I bethought me of a means of purification, as I wished to go nearer, and examine the horrid brutes at my leisure. So I got together a lot of branches of a sort of gum-tree, the leaves of which emitted a fragrant smell, and then set light to them. This had in a measure the desired effect, and, with the additional precaution of holding my nose, I was enabled to remain near the bodies for a moment or two without being sickened. With a spear I turned one of the brutes over, face upwards, and lit a bonfire close by; for it was now

nearly dark. Pen and ink cannot describe the horrid appearance of the monster: the human face—with the dreadful fangs, at least ten inches long—and surmounted by short, curly goat's horns—made up a whole perfectly fiendish; the eyes were small, red, and surrounded by short hair, from out of which they glared in death like those of an owl. The whole body was covered by a hide with bullock's hair, and the feet, large and flat, had three long toes, or rather claws.

Was it a man, a monster, or an intermediate between a huge monkey, a devil, and a human being?

I could not reply. The claws, arms, and body were those of a huge baboon; but the face was decidedly human, and, except the sort of tuft round the eyes, devoid of hair. Then the horns on the head! Who ever heard of a monkey with horns? The hide, too, with its short brown coat, that partook of the nature of a bullock! Lastly, the three-clawed feet, and the virulently poisonous tusks. To what class of created beings did they belong?

I could not say; and that evening I felt more gloomy and dispirited than I had ever done before. Dangers had not cooled me, or damped my spirit; but the very sight of those horrible brutes made my soul quail; and I believe I even thought of turning back. But then came this reflection: to go back would be as dangerous as to advance; and perhaps we had nearly passed out of the limits of forest which these hideous beings inhabited. So I ordered an encampment to be made on the top of the hill, in full view of the river, intending to cross on the morrow.

I thought to myself, perhaps these brutes will not cross after us. I was led to hope this from the fact that, though we could still hear their howlings and yellings in the forest, they were neither to be seen nor heard near the water, nor on the other side beyond. But early in the night there came on heavy storms of rain, with thunder and lightning, and in the morning the little creek, not more than twenty yards across.

was transformed into a rushing, wide river. It rained at intervals all next day, and the river steadily rose. I judged it was impossible—at all events, too hazardous—to attempt a passage with our heavy boats and baggage—besides, too, we should have all the labour of rigging them upon wheels on the other side; then, too, how about my tame elephants? We had not a boat strong enough to carry them, and I doubted the possibility of their swimming; so, all things considered, I determined to wait till the river, or rather creek, should subside, and, meanwhile, seek for a convenient ford.

Towards the afternoon of the day succeeding, the sounds of howling and yelling, which for more than a week had made our lives miserable, suddenly ceased, and a silence profound and solemn reigned in the grand old forest. I took a short excursion to satisfy myself on the point, and could discover no signs whatever of the hordes of monsters which had hitherto made the air horrible with their outcry. The day was gloomy and tempestuous, and I judged that heavy rains were falling at a distance; for the river, creek, or torrent continued to swell, so that I gave up all hope of crossing before another night had past. This night, like the one preceding it, was stormy, with heavy showers; but towards morning it cleared up, and I had good reason to hope for fine weather. The waters of the creek, however, did not subside, and, from various signs, I thought it might be some time before a crossing could be effected at the place where we were.

Accordingly, in the afternoon, I launched a small canoe on the river, which, though now deep, and somewhat dangerous to navigate, did not one whit daunt me. I placed in the canoe before starting three rifles, and, by a strange accident, a barrel of powder: an accident which, as the event proved, was as fortunate as strange, for it proved my salvation. The girl Taranta and Ramoon only were to accompany me. I took her at her own request, and also because she

was most skilful with the paddle, and, I knew, would be as useful as the strongest warrior in the light canoe. Just as I was stepping in, I bethought me that my powder-flask was nearly empty.

Now, I always made a point of being well provided with arms and ammunition on all occasions, even on the shortest, and apparently safest, excursions.

"Ramoon," I said, "run up and get some more powder."

And then, turning to Taranta, I gave her my powder-horn and bag of bullets, and bade her make cartridges ready for loading with what there was. While he was gone, she made twenty cartridges, rolling up bullet and charge of powder in a dried leaf, a supply of which she carried for the purpose.

Ramoon returned, bringing with him a whole keg of powder, instead of a small supply, as I expected. Rather than send him back with it, however, I placed it in the canoe, and away we started; and all three using our paddles with a will, we propelled the boat up stream towards a small island I espied in the midst of the stream. Now, from the bank to the island a tree, blown down by the gale, had fallen; and I thought that there might, perhaps, be an accumulation of sand and earth here, so as to render the spot available for fording. At all events, here was a natural bridge half across the river.

We paddled round the island on the other side, and allowed the canoe to drift slowly down, intending to land at a convenient spot. Unfortunately, just as we got close to the shore, the boat struck on a hidden stump, which went at once through the frail bottom. Of course, the water rushed in, and I feared that the canoe would sink in a few moments. By a vigorous stroke or two of the paddles, we propelled her to the shore, and I at once threw the rifles out, as also the keg of powder, and then leaped to land myself, Ramoon and Taranta following. We managed to drag

the canoe ashore, not without inflicting further injury on the frail fabric; and then I proceeded to examine her, with a view to repairing the damage as quickly as possible. I found that the gap in her bottom could be repaired in an hour or so. She was constructed of sheets of bark; and, as I always carried spare pieces and the necessary tools, there seemed no great difficulty in the task.

Ramoon and the girl Taranta had just commenced the task of boat-mending, when suddenly there rang out a most dreadful series of yells; and at once I knew that the forest men-monsters—devils—whatever they were—had returned. The sound came from over the hill, in the rear of the camp; and, though I looked anxiously, I could discern nothing but my own people. To my great disgust, I saw at once that a panic had set in. I was not there to inspirit them; and they ran in all directions in the greatest alarm. The yells and hideous screams grew louder and louder; and I judged that a vastly greater number of those brutes than before had assembled.

As I noticed the terrible state of panic and confusion in the camp at the top of the hill, I grew seriously concerned.

“Make haste! make haste!” I cried to Taranta and Ramoon; “hurry for your lives! I must get back to those cowards, or all will be lost.”

Now it happened that, for convenience of cooking, some twenty of my men had built a huge fire close to the water-side, at that part of the hill, and had lighted it immediately after our departure in the canoe. What was my horror when I saw a whole troop of our horrid enemies come bounding along the river-bank towards this fire, shrieking and yelling all the while in the most dismal manner! My people, to my great dismay, instantly took to flight, and sought refuge in the camp. The forest-monsters came on, whooping and yelling, and gathered around the great fire with every symptom of delight and triumph. They ran with

such prodigious speed, that several of the cowardly runaways were cut off; and, to my horror, I saw them seized, and literally torn to pieces by the fierce brutes. The situation was now critical in the extreme. *I was cut off from the camp*; and could only rejoin my panic-stricken warriors by going down stream in the canoe, and making a circuit. I well knew that nothing but my presence would inspirit them, and yet I was unable to go, by reason of the damage to the boat.

"Hasten! hasten!" I cried; "or all is lost."

"Great lord," cried Taranta, her nimble fingers moving swiftly the while, "it is almost finished."

Scarcely had she spoken, than I saw fresh troops of these demons coming along the bank from up and down stream, till I am sure there were a couple of thousand capering round the fire. Soon I saw that their attention was attracted to our little party on the island. We were only three; and the fallen tree made a natural bridge, over which it was possible for these beasts to pass. I saw them come, leaping, bounding, yelling, and shouting, to the roots of the fallen tree; and then realised the full horror of our position.

They were about to attack us!

In a moment or two a score of the brutes were crawling along the trunk of the enormous fallen tree towards us. I knew I was deadly pale, but, by a great effort, spoke calmly.

I glanced towards the frail canoe, at which both Taranta and Ramoon were working assiduously, and calculated that it would be several minutes ere the rent was repaired. Long ere that, I knew the hideous foe would be upon us.

"Ramoon," I cried, "take up a rifle, and see your aim is true; and you, Taranta, prepare to load as fast as we fire."

Ramoon rose from his task, and, taking one of the rifles, placed himself by my side. So soon as he saw what had caused me to call him, I noticed that he

shook with fear, but, by an effort, steadied himself, and prepared to fire.

Not so Taranta. She rose and calmly glanced on the advancing horde, crawling along the tree-trunk like a swarm of hideous reptiles.

"Taranta is ready," she cried, her eyes sparkling with enthusiasm, "to fight and die with her lord, the great Amarantha."

Then seizing the other rifle, she cocked it and fell on one knee in an attitude of striking grace. One admiring glance I threw on my beautiful savage heroine, and then gave the word.

"Good girl, brave girl! Now, Ramoon, aim well, —fire!"

Five reports followed in rapid succession—two of the rifles were double barrelled—and I distinctly heard the chuck—chuck—chuck of three bullets as they struck into the bodies of the advancing monsters. Instantly there was great confusion, and four rolled off the tree and were swept away by the torrent—several others struggling, and with difficulty preserving their balance. I perceived this had caused a check in the advance, but, as numbers pressed on behind, it seemed insufficient to insure our safety.

Insure our safety! I knew not the singular nature of these brutes—at one moment flying in terror, at another time only to be beaten off by the most obstinate defence. I handed my rifle to Taranta to load, and, snatching Ramoon's away, myself commenced loading it with all possible expedition; for I perceived that the poor fellow was quite unnerved, and I knew I could load two barrels while he was doing the same with the single rifle the girl had fired. She loaded before me by two or three seconds, and, to my intense joy and admiration, I heard her fire—bang—bang, and saw her knock over the two foremost. My own fire was delivered quickly afterwards, and again two more of the wretches were struggling in the stream.

"Bravo!" I shouted, as I observed the effect; "that

staggers them. They won't take many more such doses."

But I was reckoning too soon. It is true they seemed staggered, and for a moment or two recoiled, but very soon they again advanced, seemingly urged on by those behind.

All the while the yelling and howling was something terrific; and just as I delivered another fire, there came a fresh complication. The wind blowing towards us wafted the horrible odour which had nearly caused me to faint before. I saw Taranta turn pale and shudder, and felt a deadly faintness creep over me. Fortunately the wind was unsteady, and only blew in occasional gusts from that direction. But though the miasma and stench borne on the breeze only prevailed for a few seconds, I felt certain that I could not long hold up against it. It seemed these hideous beings had the faculty of poisoning the very air, and so destroying life before they actually approached.

Slowly but surely they advanced—spite of the sharp reports of our firearms and the bullets which went hissing and sputtering among them—on, on, on

Inch by inch, foot by foot, it seemed. "Bang, bang!"

A fortunate double shot wounded five of the foremost, which, in their fall, dragged others with them. A fresh outcry of hideous yells—a brief falling back—only to be followed by another advance. They came two abreast along the tree, and sometimes those in the second rank would crawl over the front ones as they were urged on from behind.

The dreadful fact now began to dawn upon me that the vast crowd on shore, all pressing onwards, would inevitably drive those lining the tree-trunk on, even though we killed a hundred or more.

Nearer and nearer they came. I could see their dreadful glaring red eyes, their white gleaming tusks, and observe the horrid corpse-like countenances, a very mockery of humanity. The suffocating, noxious

fumes from their foul carcasses became each moment stronger and more insufferable.

I looked to my camp on the hill, desperately hoping for aid from there. In vain. Wanting my presence, the whole army, warriors and hunters, had taken to flight. I could only make out the huge forms of the elephants, who seemed perfectly at ease amidst all the din and uproar. Had Ramoon been there to direct them in the strange beast language which they understood, they might have come to our assistance. But it was not so. Despair began to settle on my soul as I saw the crawling procession approaching.

And now there came what might well seem the climax of our misfortunes. Taranta Medona stepped gravely forward, and touched me on the shoulder after I had fired two shots. I saw in her face something which told me all was lost. "What is it? speak!" I cried.

"There are but five more cartridges," she said. "Give me bullets—I make some quick."

Alas! I had but seven bullets to give her. When these should be expended, our doom was sealed!

Quickly and calmly, as though nothing was the matter, the brave, noble-hearted girl made them up from the leaves she carried at her girdle, and the powder which she skilfully drew from the keg. Even at that moment of transcendent peril I could not help admiring her—so quiet, so beautiful, so brave, and so devoted to me. As she knelt beside me intent on her task—bare to the waist, her beautiful hair falling in rich profusion over her shoulders—she seemed to me a veritable angel in human form.

She finished her task, and rising handed me some of the cartridges, while she commenced loading with the rest. Suddenly she let fall the rifle and a cry broke from her. At that same instant I fired—one barrel after the other—and had the strong satisfaction of seeing three more of the dreaded foe tumble into the river.

"Ha, ha!" she cried, her whole countenance beaming with wild joy. "I save, me save!"

"What mean you, Taranta?" I asked sadly, all the while loading as fast as possible.

"The canoe, the canoe—the hole in front, and it carry me behind. Me light—it carry me."

"Yes, yes, my poor girl," I said, "I understand. It may carry you. Save yourself, and leave me to my fate."

To my surprise she burst into a passion of tears.

"No, no! Me no leave you—me die thousand times—me go save you. You keep on fighting—you kill 'em. When cartridge all gone, fight them with clubbed musket. Ha, ha! You fight well, I save you."

Then she took the powder-keg, placed it carefully in the bow of the boat, entered herself, and the next moment paddled swiftly away. What did she mean? Somehow her words raised my flagging spirit, nerved my failing limbs with fresh strength, and again and again I plied my rifle with deadly effect.

"Fight on, fight well, fight hard, great Amarantha! Taranta save her lord!"

The words thrilled my soul like heavenly music.

Looking out, I saw that she had gone round the island, and was now paddling swiftly towards the shore, and seemed to be making for a point about two hundred yards below.

What could she mean? How could she aid me thus?

I knew not; and yet her clear voice carried not only hope, but conviction, to my heart. Still my enemies press on. I have but five cartridges left, and use these with deadly effect. I have but one more. Again Taranta's welcome voice rings out:

"Fight on! fight hard! fight well!"

I saw she had landed, and was running swiftly up the hill: "Bang!" My last cartridge is gone, and I must now do battle hand to hand with these hideous fiends. On they come, not swiftly, but with deadly sureness. Grasping my rifle by the barrel, I advanced a step or two to meet the foremost.

“Fight on! fight hard! fight well!”

Clarion-like that well-loved voice fell on my ear. I saw her running along the hill in a slanting direction, so as to get in the rear of the host of forest-demons.

And I did fight hard and well—dealing blows desperately on the heads of the advancing crowd, heedless of their horrid howlings, undaunted by their hideous faces and gleaming eyes, not even impressed by the deadly miasma, which grew worse and worse each moment. I swung my rifle around my head, and brought it down smash!—smash!—again and again on the brutes.

I had thus rolled over about a dozen, in each case fracturing the skull, and often dashing their brains about, when I felt my strength deserting me—my blows grew weaker and slower—a film gathered before my eyes—and soon I became too well aware that, when I struck, my blow no longer carried death: one crawled on, and reared himself up as if to spring; by a desperate effort I struck him down, and then staggered back.

Once more I gathered all my strength for one last blow, and sent a second reeling. Then nature succumbed, and I sank back, exhausted—fainting—gasping for breath.

Dimly I saw two more of the monsters rear themselves up, and about to spring from the fallen tree on to the island.

Then there was a blaze of light—a sheet of flame followed by a great shock—and a loud, roaring explosion.

“So this is death,” I remember thinking; and all was dark.

CHAPTER XLVII.

SAVED!

WHEN I came to myself, I was lying with my head in the lap of Taranta Medona. She was fanning my face and sprinkling me with water.

"Taranta, Taranta! is it you indeed, or a hideous dream? The monsters of the woods—the men-monkeys—I thought we had a desperate battle, and that I was conquered and killed."

"No, no, dear master," she cried, her tears raining on my face; "no, me fought and conquered—no dream—Taranta save you—and all the wood-demons killed."

I raised myself up and gazed around. There was Ramoon lying insensible, his rifle beside him. There, too, was the island, and the river flowing by. But where was the huge tree along which our dreadful enemies had crawled serpent-like to our destruction?

Gone!

Where? How? What meant this sudden disappearance of a huge fallen trunk?

All this Taranta explained to me, and then I knew how I again owed my life to the slave-girl's gratitude.

Like an inspiration the plan which saved us came to her.

She took the powder-barrel with her, landed in safety, and ran to a part of the rising ground immediately in the rear of the horde of wood-demons. Close to the up-torn roots of the fallen tree the fire which some of my people had lighted still burned. Around it were hundreds of the monsters. Advancing as close as she dared, she hurled the powder-keg, watched it bound from place to place, rock to rock, until she knew it must reach the fire. Then she turned, ran, and fell on her face. The keg bounded into the midst of the fire, and, passing through it, exploded on the other side, close to the trunk of the tree. The shock tore a chasm in the soft bank, and broke the tree from its anchorage.

The explosion hurled the horrible monsters right and left, killing, scorching, and dismembering hundreds. Those who remained on the tree were hurled into the water or swept away with their resting-place. Some few escaped with a bad scorching, and sought

shelter in the woods. The rest lay corpses scorched and blackened on the river-bank.

I soon recovered, and we all three crossed the river and landed lower down, so as to avoid the dreadful and deadly stench. Unmolested I made my way to my camp, called my scattered followers around by bugle-blast, and to their intense astonishment pointed to the bodies of my hundreds of enemies, and proclaimed my victory. Then up to the heavens went the old shout:

“Amarantha! Amarantha! Great is Amarantha, the invincible White King!”

* * * * *

I made all the necessary arrangements, and quitted the spot as hastily as possible, for even at that distance the poisonous miasma from the dead monsters rendered delay dangerous. That evening we struck our camp, and moved some three miles down the river. We neither saw nor heard any more of our terrible enemies, and the next day found a ford and crossed in safety.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

ONWARDS!

FROM this time we journeyed on through the forest for many days without any thing occurring to distinguish one from the other. Our progress was necessarily slow; for although my two elephants exerted their immense strength unsparingly, yet there came places—deep morasses and hills—across which we found it necessary to drag our wheeled boats one by one. Still, however, guided by the compass, we pressed steadily on, halting and camping each evening at sundown, and again starting on the march shortly after daylight. For ten or twelve days the travelling was monotonous enough, but after that the aspect of the country slowly began to undergo a change.

We came across open patches in the hitherto unbroken forest occasionally. The immense, solemn, straight-growing trees, which we had hitherto chiefly seen, were now mingled with others of smaller size and greater luxuriance of foliage.

Birds and animals, too, had been entirely wanting at first. It seemed as if even they could not bear the eternal stillness and solitude of those ancient forest-glades. Now that I look back it appears quite bewildering : nothing all around but a perpetual series of trees, all of about the same size and height, and unvariegated in any way. Right, left, ahead, behind,—a vast army,—myriads and myriads of these forest monsters, standing stern and gloomy, like sentinels. Though the branches were very high up,—indeed, did not begin till near the top,—they then spread out in all directions, closely interweaving with each other ; and, as the leaves all lay flat during the heat of the day, and when the sun must have been blazing in full glory, we endured a sort of dismal twilight.

However, I have said there were indications that we were approaching the confines of this enormous forest belt ; and occasionally I had the satisfaction of catching a glimpse of the orb of day.

Crossing one of the open spaces I have spoken of, I one day shot a very beautiful bird. In the process of skinning, in order to preserve this specimen, I cut open the crop, which I found to contain seeds, some half-digested food, also some small peach-stones, and, what excited my wonder greatly, some little yellow lumps of metal ; applying my chemical tests to these, I found they were gold.

Now, I argued, the precious metal must be indeed plentiful where the birds, in picking gravel, as urged by nature, cannot help getting some gold in their crops. I remembered that my whole wealth consisted in this caravan and its contents, which was property of a cumbersome, uncertain value, and very precarious ; for by accident or fire I might be deprived of all. Gold, or

the other hand, would be more portable ; and, if I could procure a few tons, I could, on my return, get every thing I wanted from Europe,—machinery, implements, arms,—in order to establish a great kingdom under my sway.

The more success crowned my efforts, the more ambition urged me on. King of a tribe, why should I not be of a nation—of a province—of a continent—King of Africa? The thought was an extravagant, an audaciously ambitious one, but it did not then appear so to my mind.

I had health, determination, skill, bravery, and experience ; fortune seemed to favour me in a marvellous manner in every thing I undertook. I had an army—the nucleus of a much larger force—arms, ammunition, and a great *prestige*. What was to prevent me, after I had prosecuted my explorations beyond the great mountains, from enriching myself from the land of gold, and then returning a very Croesus, establishing a great kingdom, with its capital on a river easily accessible from the sea? Then, having consolidated my rule, I might proceed to extend it, and in time conquer the neighbouring tribes—as I subdued them, still pushing my power further—till I should be the greatest, perhaps the sole monarch worthy of a name on that vast and almost virgin continent. Such were my ambitious dreams! I was not one to rest idle, and content with dreams only. From the date of my shooting the beautifully plumaged bird (it seemed to me to be between a bird-of-paradise and a golden pheasant) my shot-gun might be heard bang, banging all day at others of the same species.

To Ramoon and Taranta I also intrusted the task of shooting as many as possible, and in the course of a week we had killed over a hundred.

Nearly all of these had in their crops, mingled with the gravel stones, which all birds seem instinctively to swallow in aid of digestion, some pieces of the precious metal.

I had carefully watched the direction from which these gold-carrying beauties came. It was from the east, whither we were journeying. They usually appeared shortly before noon, and flew back again to their unknown home an hour or so before sunset.

During the last week's progress an entire change had slowly come over the face of nature.

We now found ourselves journeying, not through a forest, but across an undulating prairie, covered with long grass, and sprinkled thickly with clumps of trees and patches of forest; but as we toiled ahead, the ground grew more level, the trees fewer and scarcer, and soon we were travelling across a vast plain, bounded in the far distance by the great mountain-range towards which I had been so long and steadily marching. I calculated we were yet a hundred and fifty miles from the foot of these enormous hills, though, from their size and altitude, they seemed much closer.

The plain was intersected in many places by streams of clear water, evidently flowing from the mountains, so we were at no loss in that respect.

Availing myself of my Californian experience, I washed out every day two or three panfuls of dirt and gravel from the bottom of these streams, and in all I found a deposit of fine gold, proving the auriferous nature of their origin.

As we advanced, the gold in the streams grew more plentiful. I felt confident that we were approaching a vast treasure, and my heart beat high with hope and ambition.

Notwithstanding these golden dreams, I did not neglect other things. We were now again in a district thickly populated with animals, and I sent out each day hunting-parties on the flanks of our march to get fresh meat for present use, both as a luxury and to save our dried stores.

A fortnight's travel over this prairie plain brought us so close to the great mountains, that they seemed

absolutely to tower over our heads, and to be in danger of toppling down on us. I had now an opportunity of examining the peculiarities of their structure, and closely scrutinised the huge chain, with the hope of discovering some way of scaling and surmounting them. But on all sides they presented an almost perfectly perpendicular front, in some places seeming actually to hang over the plain.

About thirty miles to our left, however, I discovered through my telescope what seemed to be a small fissure or gap. Determined to explore this portion, I next day directed my course towards it, and on the second evening arrived there. It presented a very extraordinary appearance.

An abrupt chasm in the mountain-range, with perpendicular sides, and seemingly cut as true and evenly as though done with hammer and chisel.

But this chasm did not extend to the ground. On the contrary, there stood an upright wall of rocks, full two thousand feet high. At this elevation it seemed as though a slice had been taken clean through the mountains, which rose perpendicularly on either side, till lost in the clouds in the summit. Could I but surmount this height of about two thousand feet, it appeared there was a channel or cutting right through the mountain! But how was it to be done? I explored the foot, and found that it was composed of the very hardest rock conceivable, so as to render the idea of cutting a path absurd.

I explored for full thirty miles on either side, and then was forced to return to this place, and acknowledge that here was my only chance of crossing.

Day by day I spent in front of this formidable fortress, and thought in vain of a method of scaling it. At last my good genius came to my aid.

In the afternoon of every day I noticed that there was always a strong breeze through this mountain-cutting towards the interior.

The beautiful birds, through which my attention

had been first called to the gold existing in the soil, took advantage of this wind, and flew easily over about sunset. At this time the whole sky at and around the gully was sometimes obscured by the myriads of feathered creatures, all flying back to their homes, wherever they might be, through this strange cutting.

One day I shot a bird, larger and of more beautiful plumage than his fellows. In his crop I found, besides several beans of gold, two stones, each as large as my little finger-nail, and of a beautiful deep-red colour. A flush came to my face, a tremor shot through my frame, as I looked on them.

I had seen some like them before. They strongly reminded me, by their appearance, of those I had brought from the "Enchanted Valley" years ago, after my first balloon adventure. I felt bewildered, and strange thoughts, dreams, and fancies pervaded me.

But to my scheme for surmounting the rocky barrier, and penetrating across these apparently inaccessible mountains.

CHAPTER XLIX.

I HIT ON A PLAN TO SCALE THE MOUNTAIN.

HAVING made up my mind to a course of action, I proceeded at once to put my project in execution. Wild and impossible as it seemed at first sight, I nevertheless had great hopes of success; for had I not before succeeded in enterprises which appeared certainly as extravagant and unlikely?

I have before spoken of the strong wind which, every afternoon, blew through the great gap in the mountain. It was on this wind I depended for success.

I procured a long, straight sapling, which I cut and planed down till it was about the thickness of my arm, and seventy feet long; then, about a third

I MAKE A MONSTER KITE.

of the distance from the top, I securely fastened another across, forty feet in length ; I joined the top of the long sapling to the ends of the shorter one by strong tough thongs of leather, and also the bottom of the long pole to the ends of the cross-piece. Here, then, I had the framework of a gigantic kite.

A kite? Yes. Such was my scheme for surmounting the rocky barrier.

I next set a couple of hundred of my men to work making strong rope out of hides ; of these we had an ample stock—enough to make many miles of rope. I calculated on making, however, only about five thousand yards, or more than three miles. When once I had taught them the way, they got on well, for they were very apt and quick with the fingers.

Meanwhile I busied myself in perfecting my monstrous kite, and also in erecting a very strong and substantial windlass to which to fasten the rope, in order to pay out or haul in, as occasion might require.

I had brought with me, as the reader knows, a considerable quantity of silk, and had also some canvas and a great quantity of hides.

First I covered the framework with silk doubled, which I varnished and fastened securely ; then I strengthened the upper part with strips of hides and the lower with canvas, till I was convinced it would resist any pressure of the wind without tearing.

I tried it by means of weights, and carefully strengthened every weak part. Next I set to work and made a tail to the kite. I did not trouble about ornament, you may be sure, but contented myself with a piece of strong hide-rope thirty-five yards long. Then I made a light wicker basket, just capable of holding one comfortably. I made pockets in the side of this, to place a few instruments—barometer, thermometer, telescope, sextant, besides a bottle of rum and some water, and a few other things. All this took me a fortnight, and by the end of that time the five

thousand yards of hide-rope were also completed, so well had my men worked.

No one had the least idea of my intentions, not even Rambobranda, but all worked unquestioningly and with a will.

I said, no one ; but I had an idea, from a certain twinkle in Ramoon's eyes, and an expression he let drop once or twice, that he thought this machine of mine was a new kind of "baroon," as he used to call my balloon.

He looked upon it with awe, and several times I saw him shake his head, and mutter, "Not dis chicken; he don't go barooning no more."

CHAPTER L.

OVER THE MOUNTAIN.—FAIRY-LAND !—FAREWELL !

My great machine being all ready, I propped it upright and waited for the afternoon breeze. It came, and, so soon as it gathered sufficient strength, up rose my gigantic kite. When I had satisfied myself that it would mount higher and higher, according as managed, and was perfect in every detail, I rapidly slackened the rope from the windlass, and let it descend to earth.

On the morrow I set about this my last and desperate enterprise.

Precisely four hours after noon I seated myself in the wicker car attached to the tail of my kite, which was now swaying and surging about like a huge bird anxious to be off.

I myself severed the rope which held it down, and then I felt myself rising—borne upward by the breeze. The kite swayed about very much, so with the guiding-strings I held I altered the angle so as to cause her to offer less surface to the wind.

This caused her to steady, and by signalling Rambobranda and Ramoon at the windlass alternately

with a red and white flag, to slacken away and hold on, I found I had the kite under perfect control.

I was now about a hundred yards high only, looking down, I could see Taranta Medona and all my people gazing upwards in the utmost astonishment at seeing me thus mount calmly to the sky. They must at that moment have thought I was indeed a spirit, to be able to rise in the air at will.

The girl, when she saw I perceived her, fell upon her knees, and in piercing tones of entreaty besought me to come back.

"Amarantha! Amarantha!" she cried, "return, oh, return! or let me go with you!"

I laughed, and shouted to her to be of good heart, that I would be back presently.

Then I gave the signal to pay out rope slowly, and the kite commenced to rise, and at the same time drift towards the gully, through which the wind was rushing by this time rather fiercely. However, I had perfect confidence in the rope and windlass, and felt myself rising—rising—rising—with scarce a feeling of uneasiness.

After about an hour, I saw I was on a level with the rock in the cutting. Still I rose, till I overtopped it, and could see across. To my joy, it did not appear wide, though it was filled with caverns and chasms.

I signalled for the rope to be paid out faster; the wind blew very fiercely, and presently a sheet of mist came driving along, which, for a while, hid my people at the windlass from me. However, this did not trouble me greatly.

At about five o'clock I judged that nearly three miles of rope had been paid out, and at the same time the clouds and mist dispersed almost suddenly.

As it rolled away, I looked around and beneath me; a splendid and gorgeous prospect met my astonished vision. At this point, the mountain-range, though lofty, was not broad, and at the place where I had surmounted the chasm across, it could not have been more than a mile. I found myself floating in

mid-air in this narrow passage or gully, through which the wind fiercely and loudly roared. The mountains on either side of me rose perpendicularly, till each side seemed to meet in the clouds above my head. I could just discern my people at the windlass, and, having waved my flag for "more rope," looked the other way.

There, spread before me, lay a magnificent scene—a vast valley, green and verdant, with beautiful spreading trees, flowers of many colours, and gorgeously plumed birds flitting about over the calm lake which lay in the centre. On this lake I saw boats with white canopies, propelled by oars and sails, and I could distinguish through my glass that the people in them were not black, but, on the contrary, of dazzling fairness. Around the borders of this beautiful lake I could see white buildings, as though of marble, splendid cities and villages. I could see that the mountain-chain swept round the lake in a circular form, and on the other side I could discern the dim outline of distant hills. As rope was paid out slowly, I floated away over this happy lake, gazing in dream like ecstasy on the glorious scene.

Suddenly there crept over my mind an impression that I had seen all this before. While I was puzzling or doubting, I felt a smart shock, or rather jerk, and I knew by the increased strain on the cord that all had been paid out. At this moment a furious gust of wind came down through the gully, driving a quantity of mist and thousands of birds before it. For a moment the kite swayed furiously to and fro; then it suddenly plunged downwards. I knew I, too, was falling.

The rope had broken! Down—down—down!

My brain turned dizzy. I felt faint with terror.

Swifter and swifter I plunged down the headlong descent—unable to speak, or even to see.

At last—a plunge—a shock—and I felt myself rushing through a body of water—still downwards! Almost insensible, at last this terrible descent ceased, and struggling, choking, I felt I was slowly rising to

the surface. The few moments which this occupied seemed to me an age. I was able to fetch breath as I felt my head shoot out of water.

Two or three gasping breaths, and I was seized and dragged on board a boat or pleasure-barge. Then, for a time, I lapsed into a state of nearly insensibility.

When I came to, I found myself lying on a couch of soft silken texture, in a boat, shaded by a canopy of the same. A bright rose-coloured light shone around, and I saw, flitting about me, beautiful female forms ; one among them advanced to my side, and said some words which at first I could not comprehend, but suddenly there broke over my mind a memory of the language, and I understood the words :

“It is he ! I knew he would return.”

The words—the voice ! What could it mean ? I raised myself on my elbow, and gazed around. Then the truth burst on me like lightning’s flash. I was in the presence of my old love, Glorious Golden Hair, the king’s daughter, my adventures with whom I have already recounted. I was again in the Enchanted Valley, and without knowing it had for months been straining every nerve to reach it.

It seemed as though it were fate. Fresh marvels—or rather, to me, old ones—with the charm of reality, met me every where.

For some time I was perfectly benumbed, and doubted whether I was not dreaming or mad. By degrees, however, I was enabled to realise the truth.

That I was in the same marvellous country which I had before named the Enchanted Valley, there could be no doubt. I had, however, come to the conclusion, long ago, that this scene of my early balloon adventures lay in the centre of Australia. In this I was mistaken, beyond all doubt. Deceived by the quiet but swift motion of my first big balloon, I thought, when I alighted near Sydney in Australia, I had come only a comparatively short distance. I was wrong ; and both in coming to and leaving this “Fairy-land,” must have been borne through the air by a hurricane-blast

with almost incredible speed. I felt humiliated when I discovered what a vast error I had made, in so confidently accepting surmises as facts. I could descant for ever on the glories and beauties of this country in the centre of Africa, where even the laws of nature, as the rest of the world know them, are altered or suspended. But not now. It is time for me to bring this "strange, eventful history" to a close. Some day, perhaps, I may have more to say—fresh wonders, fresh perils, fresh triumphs to relate.

I was attired in rich clothes as before, and taken to the king, who embraced me, and finally offered me his daughter "Glorious Golden Hair" in marriage.

Life here is paradise. I suppose I shall never again leave this happy valley; indeed, I know not whether I could if I would, as I have no longer a balloon, or the materials for making one—yes, I have; but only sufficient for a little one, a toy one, which I intend to despatch, laden with a full account of my adventures, when the wind blows strongly to the west. It will perhaps be drifted to the sea-coast, and picked up by some English or American vessel. Alas! poor Taranta Medona, and my faithful followers, Ramoon, Ramjam-roc, Rambobranda, and all my army! I fear I shall never see any of you again.

But no; it shall not be! Taranta Medona, my brave, true-hearted, loving, savage beauty, I should be an ingrate indeed did I suffer you to perish, or mourn in ignorance of my fate, without an effort! That effort shall be made! For the present, adieu!

* * * *

This manuscript, as it stands, I shall to-morrow send up in a small balloon I have constructed, trusting to the winds of heaven to bear it where it may be found and read, and my marvellous adventures made known to the world; also the existence of this extraordinary country in the centre of Africa, surrounded by insurmountable mountains.

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